

How Workfare Programs Fare in Hong Kong? A User Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at scrutinizing the workfare approach, specifically the Intensive Employment Assistance Project (IEAP) in Hong Kong. This new alternative emerged in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis which has revealed the economic fragility of the state (budget deficits) as well as individuals (unemployment and poverty) under the wave of globalization.

In the past, welfare ideologies were largely dominated by the residualist-institutionalist dichotomy. However, the wave of globalization is bringing about new risks and uncertainties, and has also carved out a new era of state/society relationships, calling for new ways to solve old social problems. The IEAP is certainly one of these innovative efforts. Hence, it is especially important to unveil the black box and examine what works and what does not in this new approach in the local context.

A qualitative approach was adopted in obtaining the emic perspectives from both the participants and the professional social workers on why, how and to whom this approach works or otherwise. One successful case as indicated by the performance attainments set by the Social Welfare Department has been chosen as the subject of study. The IEAP studied was generally considered as desirable from the users' perspective. Its compulsory participation and being-first orientation denotes a blend of coercion and care which demonstrates the realization of the harmonization of both the economic and social objectives as suggested by Midgley (1995). The thesis argues the major policy direction in the enhancement of workfare

initiatives lies in the further promotion of an ethic of care, namely the strengthening of family solidarity, involvement of professional social workers' intervention and enhancing the legal protection of the working poor. Thus, the challenge ahead appears to be how to make work an asset and wealth generating instead of something detestable.

摘要

本論文旨在研究香港社會保障制度中促進自力更生的深入就業援助計劃。這個以參與與工作有關的活動為條件來換取援助金的方案是一九九七年金融風暴後的產物。金融風暴引發的經濟衰退使失業率不斷攀升又令政府的財政出現赤字，揭示了在全球化的影響下，政府以及個人在經濟上的脆弱。

以往福利界的意識形態大多集中於殘餘化與制度化的兩極討論，然而全球化的浪潮為我們帶來了新的危機和不穩定因素，也為這時代塑造了新的政府與公民關係，促使社會以創新的方法處理舊有的社會問題。深入就業援助計劃正是一例，因此了解內裡的實際運作並探究其成功與失敗的因素對於香港未來社會發展的方向尤其重要。

本研究採用質性研究方法，透過訪談專業社工、正參與和曾參與此計劃的受助人，以了解計劃為何及怎樣達致成功(或失敗)。本研究根據社會福利署制定的準則，鎖定一個成功的例子，並獲該機構同意研究它們推行的深入就業援助計劃。

總括而言，受訪者對此計劃的評價是正面的。研究發現這個計劃的成功乃揉合了強制性的參與以及以人為本、以關懷為前題的介入模式。這個剛柔並濟、軟硬兼施的策略能協調經濟與社會發展目標，使兩者共同和諧地發展。研究亦發現若要進一步提昇自力更生計劃的成效，應加強關懷為本的政策，如：鞏固

家庭的支持系統、加強專業社工的介入和提高對在職人士尤其低收入一族的法律保障。所以我們面前的挑戰是要將工作由厭惡性轉化為有意義並可持續發展的資產。

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter briefly outlines the research area and the objectives of this study. It provides a short but holistic picture to the background of the research: what actually instigated such an inquiry and its significance. Moreover, the methodology chosen in answering the research questions is also succinctly reviewed.

1.1 Research Area and Objectives

This study aims at gaining insights into the well-being of the economically disadvantaged groups, specifically the able-bodied unemployed or low-income individuals in Hong Kong who have fallen into the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) net. This is realized by scrutinizing a recently adopted workfare approach, the Intensive Employment Assistance Program (IEAP) through a normative perspective, the Social Development Approach suggested by Midgley (1995).

The primary research question is to explore the contributions (or otherwise) of this new alternative, the IEAP, in the Hong Kong context from a user perspective. This is achieved by:

- 1) Analyzing the program factors or elements of intervention that could facilitate the successful transformation from reliance on CSSA to independent and

self-sufficient citizens from both the perspectives of the participants and the social work practitioners;

- 2) Exploring factors facilitating and inhibiting recipients in leaving the welfare system other than the program factors, again from the perspectives of the participants and the social work practitioners; and
- 3) Analyzing the relative desirability and feasibility of different welfare approaches.

1.2 Background and Conceptual Framework

Poverty has long been a worldwide social problem and concern in both the developed and developing regions. It seemed to be an inescapable challenge to states irrespective their political ideologies, namely democratic socialism and the New Right, especially in times of economic downturn.

Democratic socialism has once been theoretically sound, practically feasible and widely adopted in the West after the Second World War. However, its traditional rights-based, universal mode of welfare provision, which incurred tremendous costs, was deemed problematic and discredited in times of economic stagflation. It was thus challenged by the neo-liberal economists, who have been continually gaining political favour and legitimacy in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Mishra, 1984, 1990). The New Right Advocates believed in minimal state intervention and maximum market dependence, which was a total overturn of the welfare state ideology. However, the New Right era has been accompanied by the wave of globalization, which was characterized by opportunities as well as risks and

uncertainties (Giddens & Hutton, 2000; George & Wilding, 2002). Most parts of the globe were masked by economic crisis in different periods during the past few decades. Moreover, the welfare regimes, which played significant roles to different degrees in different societies in the past, seem debilitated in today's postindustrial era. During times of economic tribulations, governments in many parts of the world suffered from budget deficits thus strive to cut expenditures relentlessly, while the market failed to absorb the sudden excessive labour supply as revealed in the increasing unemployment rate. The dissolution of families has also been a continuing trend, as illustrated in the ever-increasing divorce rates and single-parent families, rendering individuals at risk even more prone to social exclusion.

Unfortunately, it seemed that both the dominant social democratic and neo-liberal camps could offer no feasible solution to the aggravating problems of poverty and inequality (Midgley & Tang, 2001). The paradox – when social services and statutory welfare programs seem unsustainable, the greater are the demands for social protection and vice versa – continues to survive.

Hong Kong situated in the midst of the global context is inevitably facing the same risks, which have been exacerbated by the hit of the Asian Financial Crisis (AFC) in 1997. In the midst of such an economic crisis and the incapacitated welfare regimes as described above, individuals at risks simply have nowhere to turn to, hence giving rise to the rhetoric of self-sufficiency / self-reliance emanated from the government (Social Welfare Department, 1998).

The self-reliance strategies put forward were in fact workfare or

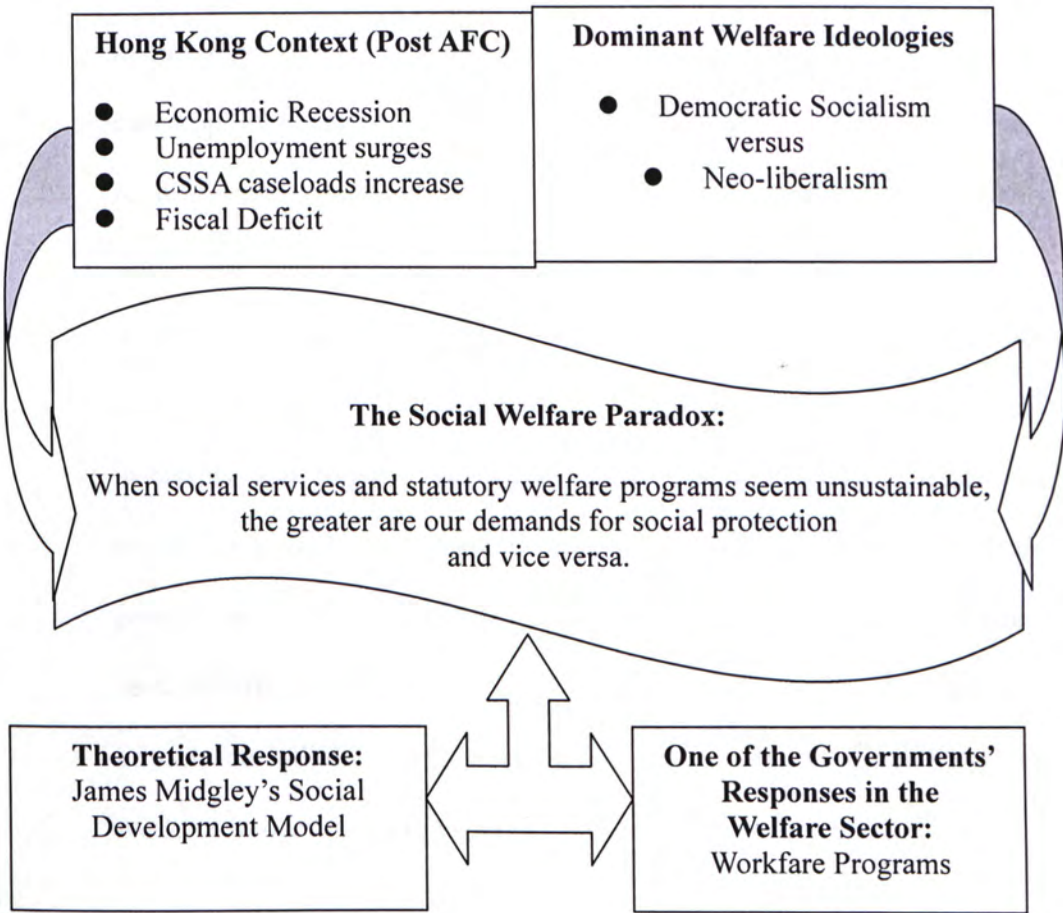
welfare-to-work programs. It is a way to solve poverty through work by transforming the traditional rights-based or eligibility-based benefits into some form of work-based or efforts-based welfare. It is indeed difficult to find a consensual definition for workfare across space and time (Peck, 1998). However, common elements such as workfare is compulsory, is primarily about work and is essentially about policies tied to the lowest tier of state assistance, were identified (Lødemel, 2000). Thus workfare could basically be defined as policies which require social assistance beneficiaries to work or participate in work-related activities¹ in exchange for social assistance benefits. Such initiatives began to take root in Hong Kong since the launching of the Self-reliance Scheme in 1999 as a response to the ever-increasing CSSA caseloads and expenditures. Indeed, this workfare approach has begun to gain favour in many nations since the last half of the past century, for instance, the United States, Britain, Canada and Norway etc. (Van Voorhis & Gilbert, 2001). The emergence of this alternative arose mainly from financial imperatives, aiming at alleviating huge and ever expanding welfare expenditures.

Though it gained currency in both neo-liberal and social democratic states, there were disputes between the left and the right on the actual implementation and its impacts. This research thus aims at examining the desirability and feasibility of this new innovation in tackling the century-old problem of poverty in the local context. Please see Figure 1.1 for a diagrammatic representation of the conceptual layout.

¹ European commentators generally adopted a broader definition than the U.S. writers. For instance, Standing (1990, p. 678) referred to 'work-related activities' which include both labour market and social policy activities instead of just employment in the open labour market.

Figure 1.1

Conceptual Framework of the Study



1.3 Significance of the Research

This research is important in the following four ways:

- 1) In the midst of the economic transformation together with the additional catastrophic impact of the AFC and the subsequent outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003, social problems unavoidably aggravated and the Hong Kong government's financial ability to pay for welfare spending remains a worrying issue. Under such tension, the unemployed or low-income workers were especially prone to economic instability and fragility. Not only the affected individuals, but also the society as a whole might have to bear the undesirable consequences if the problem has not been dealt with quickly. Thus, as new innovative programs came to birth (in this case, the IEAP), it is especially significant to assess its impacts on individuals. Analysis of the desirability and feasibility of the workfare programs are thus of relevance to policy implementation.

- 2) Indeed past evaluation studies on the Support for Self-reliance Scheme have been carried out (Social Welfare Department, 2001, 2005; Leung, Ip & Au, 2003; Tang, Mok, Lou & Cheung, 2005). Nevertheless, they were done by either the SWD itself or commissioned and sponsored by the SWD. This may pose the problem of conflicts of interest addressed as one of the propriety standards in 'The Program Evaluation Standards' compiled by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994). Moreover, these evaluation studies were inevitably highly administrative-led, focusing predominantly on the program's effectiveness in moving CSSA recipients

out of the CSSA net. From these previous studies, we do know the gross short-term success rate in achieving self-reliance. However, the figures did not give us adequate information on why, how, to whom and which type of interventions were successful / preferential or otherwise. Moreover, most, if not all, were quantitative studies, merely reflecting the etic views, which might easily omit or neglect important and valuable insights from the emic perspectives, for instance, the respondents' inner worldviews and interpretation towards their own poverty situation etc. In fact, the SWD has commissioned the Chinese University of Hong Kong to execute an evaluation study of the employment assistance programs, especially on the IEAP in 2004. That study adopted survey interviewing, which was again a quantitative approach, as a dominant mode of data collection, hence the questions and content of study were from an outsider's view. This etic viewpoint could be valuable in that it could provide some fresh perspectives, which the users involved might be too close to aware, notwithstanding the fact that the researchers' and the respondents' different life experiences, socio-economic backgrounds, worldviews etc. might curtail insiders' viewpoints, feelings and what they regard as of utmost importance to them. This view was supported by Mead (2005) in his review on the researches on welfare reform in the United States. He argued that the statistically rigorous studies fall short of policy content, and that policy recommendations were rather better informed in field studies. Hence, this proposed study attempts to study the program through the eyes of the concerned parties, aiming at understanding and explaining things through their 'native viewpoint'. Thus this study predominantly adopts a qualitative approach in order to collect

thicker, first-hand description to fill the gap of this area of research in the local context.

- 3) Furthermore, this study is basically theory-driven instead of administrative-led. The insights gained from practical implementation, for instance, the different workfare approaches – education-first versus work-first workfare, could thus contribute to the theoretical development of the ideologies in social welfare.
- 4) Last but not least, many East Asian countries, for instance Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan and many other Asian developing countries are facing tough times as that in Hong Kong, while Hong Kong could be regarded as the ‘pioneer’ in developing a relatively more systematic and extensive workfare programs amongst those countries². The findings of this research could therefore provide a crucial source of reference for other East Asian states.

² The AFC also caused a soaring increase in unemployment rate in South Korea -- from 2.6% in 1997 to 6.8% in 1998, as well as in its Public Assistance (means-tested welfare relief) to over 11 billion Won in 1999, which is a 97.5% increase from that in 1998 (Ministry of Labour, 1999). Thus South Korea has also begun to apply the workfare ideology or the so-called 'productive welfare' as a response to reduce the possible disruptive impact of mass employment by enacting the National Basic Livelihood Standards Act (NBLS) in November 2000. The NBLS replaced the Public Assistance Program by wider coverage and higher benefit levels but provides safety net to the able-bodied poor between 18 and 65 under the condition that they should participate in job training or job placement programs (Henderson, Hulme, Phillips & Kim, 2002; Kwon, 2002).

1.4 Research Methodology

Due to time and resources constraints, an embedded case study design is adopted. One of the most successful IEAP (as indicated by the performance attainments set by the SWD) implemented by one non-governmental organization (NGO) was chosen as the subject or one unit of analysis. The other embedded subjects or second level of analysis is the users i.e., the practitioners and the participants involved in that particular IEAP. These respondents (participants) were located through stratified purposeful sampling, according to their duration in receiving CSSA and their subsequent CSSA or employment status after participating in the IEAP. This design is supported by the naturalistic paradigm of qualitative inquiry, and data collection was mainly performed in form of face-to-face interviews, capturing the emic perspectives of the users.

1.5 Chapter Organization

Including this introductory chapter, there are altogether eight chapters in this thesis. Chapter Two provides a review on Hong Kong's economic and social security development in the past few decades, which gives a background for which to understand the existence of the social welfare paradox during times of economic depression. Chapter Three moves from an objective description of the present situation to a theoretical account of the two dominant social welfare ideologies since World War Two elucidating the continual survival of the paradox. Chapters Four and Five then examine how the states in the West and in Hong Kong responded to such a welfare paradox respectively and hence pave way for the subject of research in this

study. After setting up the backdrop, Chapter Six explains the methodology of the current study and its philosophical justifications. Chapter Seven then logically presents the findings of the study, followed by a concluding Chapter (Chapter Eight) on the discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER TWO

HONG KONG IN THE MIDST OF ITS TRANSFORMATION

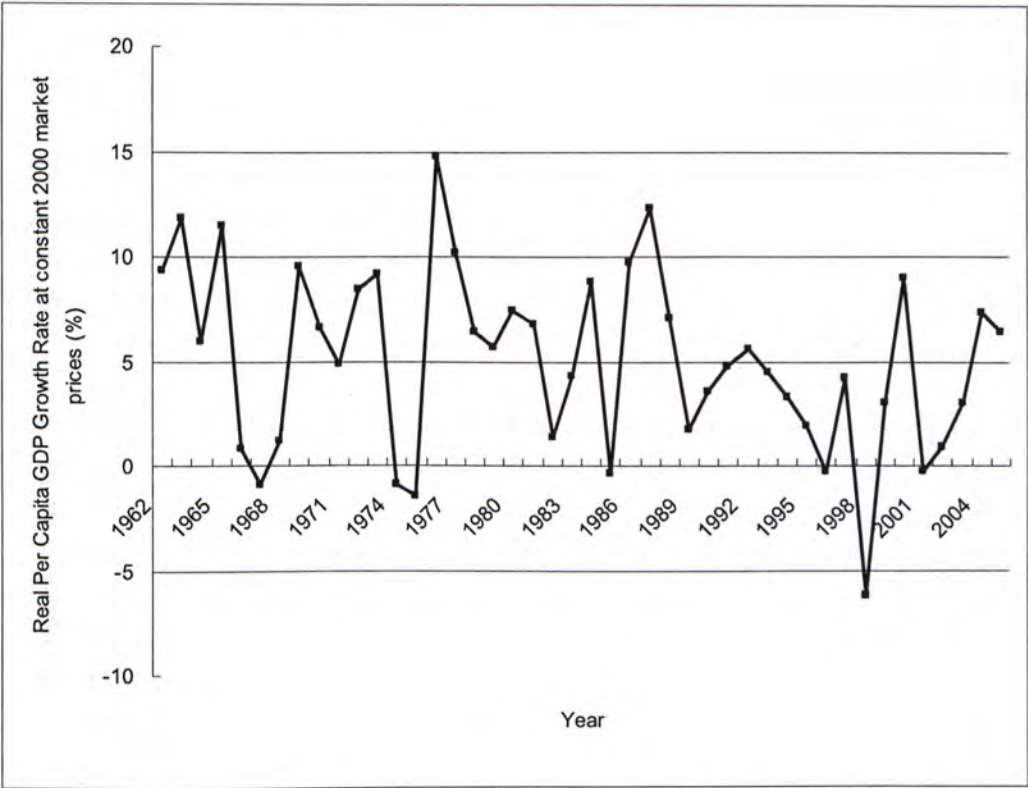
This chapter reviews the relationship between Hong Kong's economic transformation and its development of social welfare, namely social security, in the past few decades, which provides us with the background in understanding the existence of the welfare paradox.

2.1 A State of Euphoria: Prelude to the Crisis

Hong Kong has been transformed from a modest fishing harbour to a significant metropolitan city of international significance in a few decades' time. The transformation in this minute piece of land has been considered miraculous, attracting gazes from around the world. Hong Kong has always been proud of its success as a free market economy. Milton Friedman (1981, p. 54) even lauded Hong Kong as the epitome of free markets and limited government. However, Cheung (1998) argued that non-interventionism was only a myth. In the colonial times, as industrialization took place, the economy escalated, and simultaneously social services, transport and public works expanded rapidly. Some argued that industrialization is a prerequisite in the creation of statutory welfare programs (Wilensky & Libeaux, 1965; Midgley, 1986; Hill, 1996). Thus, the Financial Secretary Haddon-Cave (1984) then had to admit that the government was essentially adopting positive non-interventionism instead of laissez-faire, meaning

that ‘the government had to respond when industries with social obligations ran into trouble and when an institution needed regulation to prevent inequitable practice’ (Wikipedia, 2006). Though undertaken reluctantly and without deliberate intention to promote social equality, it resulted in positive social outcomes. During that stage i.e., prior 1997, Hong Kong has been characterized as a city with high economic growth rate (see Figure 2.1) and high inflation rate (see Figure 2.2) yet with extremely low unemployment rate (see Figure 2.3).

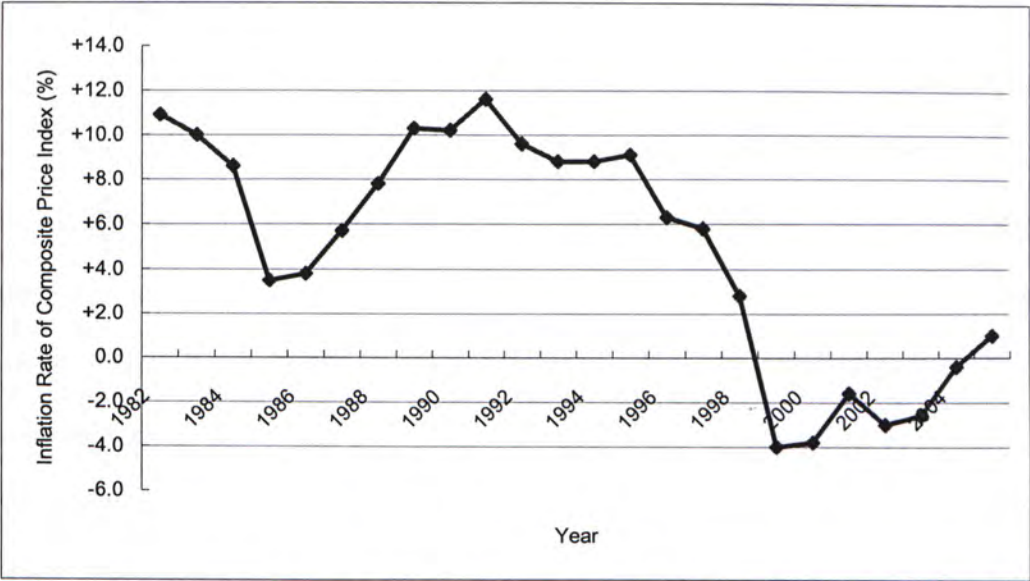
Figure 2.1
Economic Growth Rate in Hong Kong, 1962-2005



Note. From Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR. (2006). *Gross Domestic Product (GDP), implicit price deflator of GDP and per capita GDP* [Data file]. Available from Census and Statistics Department Web site, http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hong_kong_statistics/statistical_tables/index.jsp

Figure 2.2

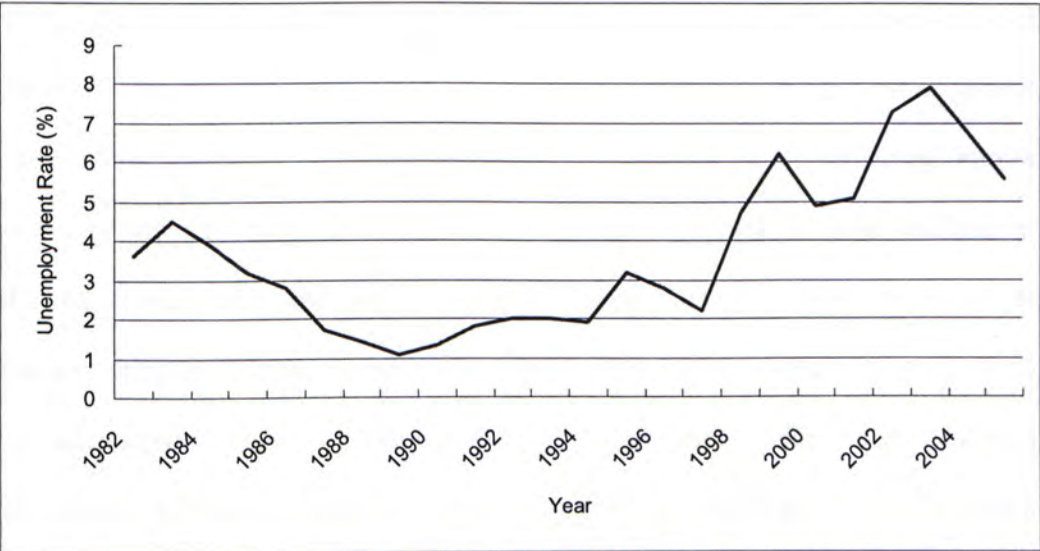
Inflation Rate in Hong Kong, 1982-2005



Note. From Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR. (2006). *Consumer Price Indices* [Data file]. Available from Census and Statistics Department Web site, http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hong_kong_statistics/statistical_tables/index.jsp

Figure 2.3

Unemployment Rate in Hong Kong 1982-2005

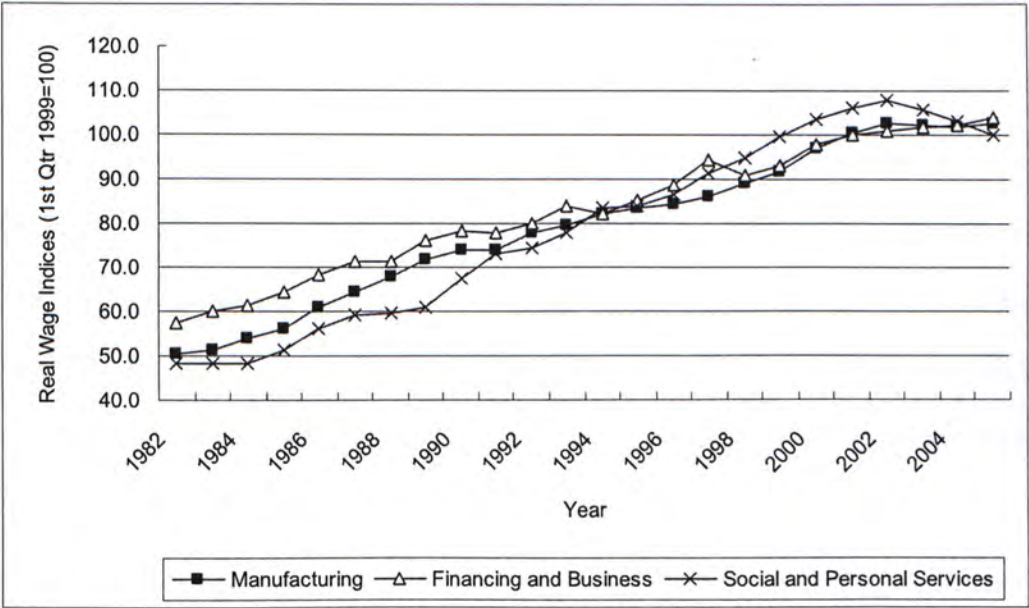


Note. From Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR. (2006). *Labour Force, Unemployment and Unemployment* [Data file]. Available from Census and Statistics Department Web site, http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hong_kong_statistics/statistical_tables/index.jsp

Accompanying the economic expansion were rising land and labour costs, which in turn imposed stringent barriers for enterprises. Furthermore, China in the 1970s has been gradually transforming from a centrally planned economy to an increasingly market-oriented system, the announcement and implementation of the new Open Door policy in 1979 has attracted foreign investment (Chai & Kwong, 1996). Hong Kong entrepreneurs were as usual, market sensitive and economically alert, thus moving a substantial share of their industrial operations, especially the labour-intensive ones, to the open coastal regions of China, where wages and land costs were much lower than that in Hong Kong, in order to regain their international competitiveness. Between 1979 and 1993, Hong Kong has accounted for over 60% of all direct foreign investments in China, and 80% of that in the Guangdong province (Chai & Kwong, 1996). This 'hollowing out' or 'deindustrialization' process has certainly brought about economic restructuring and the intersectoral shifts has altered the structure of the employment market (Chen & Li, 1996). Hong Kong with its inseparable relationship with China, has largely been affected by Deng Xiao Ping's pro-market reforms. The increasing cross-border relocation of manufacturing processes and export of services to China had elevated the economic restructuring process – deindustrialization – transforming Hong Kong into a service-oriented economy. In 1980, manufacturing constituted for about one quarter of Hong Kong's GDP and about 38% of its employment. By 1994, the sector of manufacturing in GDP had dropped to 17% while that of services has risen to 69% and accounted for 55% of Hong Kong's employment (Census and Statistics Department, various years). This restructuring process could also be reflected in the real wage indices. In the 1970s and early 1980s, there were a much higher demand for workers in the manufacturing industries as revealed in its relatively higher wage,

however, as the deindustrialization took place, the demand and hence the growth of wages in the manufacturing industries have slowed down, while the growth of wages in the social and personal services industry has surpassed that of the manufacturing industries (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4
Real Wage Indices by Industries in Hong Kong, 1982-2005



Note. From Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR. (2006). *Real Indices of Payroll per Person Engaged by Industry Sector* [Data file]. Available from Census and Statistics Department Web site, http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hong_kong_statistics/statistical_tables/index.jsp

As the year 1997, in which the return of sovereignty to China, was drawing nearer and nearer, Hong Kong residents started questioning whether the political autonomy and the economic prosperity could be retained, thus triggering a spur in emigration. Their original brittle confidence was further crashed after the 4 June 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, which revealed Chinese government’s brutality towards promoters of democracy. The number of emigrants was estimated to be

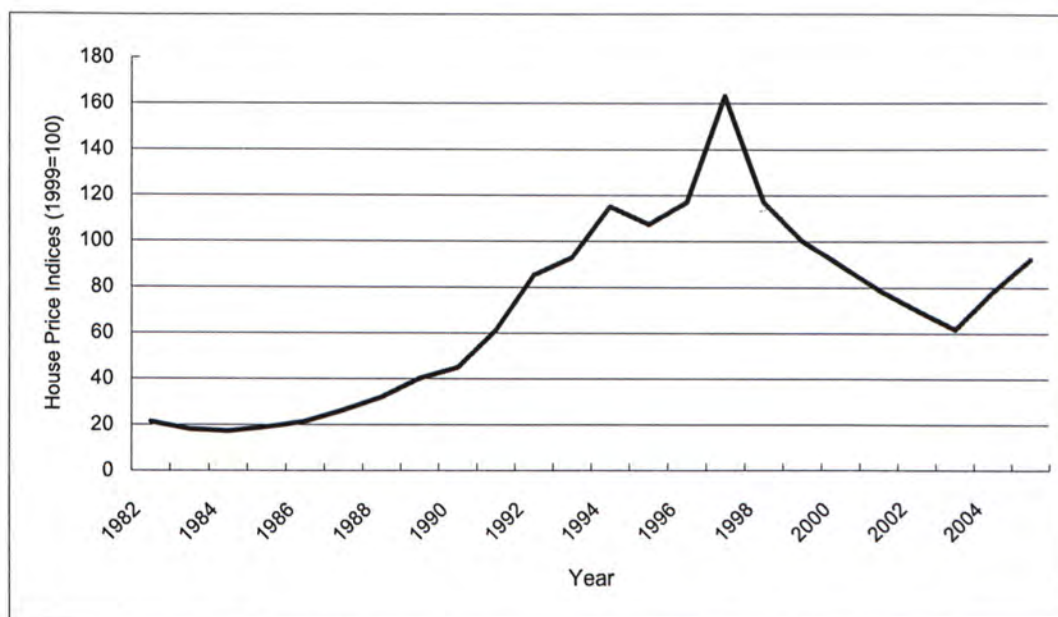
between 18,000 and 22,000 in the first half of the 1980s, it rose quickly and was estimated to be 62,000 people every year since 1987, and peaked at 66,000 in 1992 after the Tiananmen incident (Liu, 1999; Skeldon, 1991). Majority of the emigrants were better educated and highly skilled, causing the service sectors to suffer most. The outflow of skilled personnel readily provided vacancies to absorb the residual labour in the manufacturing sector as a result of the northward migration of factories. This antagonistic labour market dynamics in the 1980s helped to submerge the possible unemployment problem that might have arisen.

In a context where demand for labour was continuously rising especially in the service sector against a relatively slackened growth of labour force, the overall wages thus rose rapidly, from an index of 47 in 1982 to 88.9 in 1997 (Census and Statistics Department, 2006). Inflation has accelerated to a high level when compared with international standards, as a result of rapid transformation of the economy and high wage growth combined with the linked exchange rate system. Since land is a relatively non-traded resource, it is highly susceptible to inflation; coincidentally, the Sino-British agreement limited the sale of land to 50 hectares per annum from 1984 to 1997 in order to satisfy the Chinese government's suspicion towards British conspiracy. The restricted supply of land could not meet the strong demand thus pushing up property prices to an extraordinarily high level – an eight fold increase has taken place in the decade before 1997 (Rating and Valuation Department, various years) (see Figure 2.5). During this period, property developers, investors, speculators, homeowners and all those in the property-related businesses gained windfall capital as assets appreciated. This property boom has also attracted foreign capital from neighbouring countries e.g. Australia, Japan and the Mainland

China (Leung, 1996). The bubble economy was taking shape in the presence of labour and land supply bottlenecks (Liu, 1999; Tsang, 1999).

Figure 2.5

House Price Indices in Hong Kong, 1982-2005

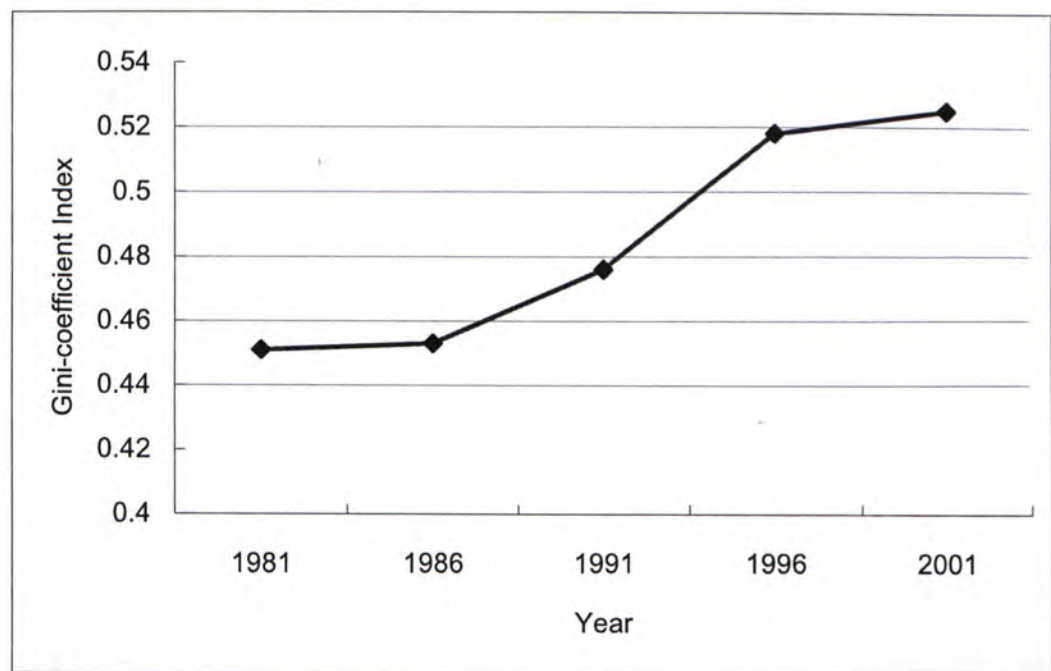


Note. From Rating and Valuation Department, Hong Kong SAR. (2006). *Property Market Statistics: Private Domestic – 1979-2005 Price Indices by Class (Territory-wide)* [Data file]. Available from Rating and Valuation Department Web site, <http://www.rvd.gov.hk/cgi-bin/rvd/TextOnly.pl?search=/en/publications/pro-review.htm>

Nevertheless, accompanying the soaring inflation was the widening income gap, the Gini coefficient has rose to 0.525 in 2001, which was the highest historically (see Figure 2.6). The share of the lowest decile income of households had fallen step-wisely from 2.3% in 1971 to 1.1% in 1996, while the highest decile had a share of household income rising from 34.6% to 41.8% within the same period (Census and Statistics Department, 2001). Such worrying developments in the pre-1997 period was aggravated by the subsequent Asian financial crisis.

Figure 2.6

Gini Coefficient in Hong Kong, 1981-2001



Note. From 1) Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR. (2001). *Population Census Main Report: Volume 1*. Hong Kong: Government Printer. 2) Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR. (2001). *Population By-Census*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.

2.2 Post 1997 Crisis

1997 was a year of double significance in Hong Kong’s history. The transition from a British Colony to a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China, has attracted worldwide attention on the feasibility and stability under the ‘one country two systems’ arrangement. Stability in political sense was the main concern, while economic prosperity has been taken for granted; however, the Asian Financial Crisis erupted in the same year, abruptly undermining the optimistic economic prospect, which has been taken for granted for the past two decades.

The Asian Financial Crisis was caused by a series of currency speculation, which began with the depreciation of the Thai Baht in July 1997. Hong Kong dollar was attacked subsequently, and in order to protect the currency link with US, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority bought Hong Kong dollars unloaded by the speculators and the clearing balance accounts of the banks at Hong Kong Monetary Authority were depleted, consequently, the overnight interbank rate shot up to 280% (Jao, 1999).

Since Hong Kong remained linked to the US dollar, it kept steady at 7.75 throughout the crisis, while most other Asian currencies had depreciated substantially, the Indonesian Rupiah by 79%; the Thai Baht by 51%; the Korean Won by 42%; the Malaysian Ringgit by 41%; the Philippines Peso by 28%; the Taiwan dollar by 16%; and the Singapore dollar by 14% (Liu, 1999). Such currency depreciation in the neighbouring countries had rendered a relative high cost structure in Hong Kong thus lowering its competitiveness in the Asian Pacific Region.

Due to its free and open economy, Hong Kong is prone to local and global changing market conditions, thus cost adjustment was swift. Hong Kong's real per capita GDP has dropped ten per cent, from +4.2% to -6.2% immediately after the financial hit. The lately ever increasing property prices were hardly hit, and dropped promptly by over 50% since the end of 1997 (Rating and Valuation Department, 2001) (see Figure 2.5). The whole economy has entered into a deep trough. The Asian Financial Crisis was an exemplar illustrating the potential hazards of a globalizing world. This catastrophic condition was further aggravated by the '911' incident in 2001 and the SARS outbreak in 2003.

The myth of the ever-increasing prices, wages and living standards had been smashed. The taken for granted euphoric state of high growth, high employment and high inflation rate in the industrialization period had come to a halt. The once worshipped laissez faire economy has unmasked its frailness in the increasingly globalized economy. Hong Kong is now setting off her new journey in the information era engulfed in the wave of globalization. In one respect, the technological advancement in an open and globalized economy has offered precious opportunities for the acquisition of wealth. Nonetheless, the advancement in skills and human capital of the mass labour lags behind the rapid response of the labour market in this economic restructuring process, thus leading to unresolved surge of unemployment (see Figure 2.3).

2.3 Development of Social Security in Hong Kong

Scholars like Tang (2000) suggested that Hong Kong has essentially been adopting a neo-liberal approach to social welfare, believing that benefits of the economic growth would naturally and equitably trickle down to the whole population. Hence the state has been playing a minimal role and yet adopting an incremental approach in social provisions in order to stabilize the society during the transition. This was also echoed by the Chief Executive, Donald Tsang's description of Hong Kong style capitalism as 'big market, small government'. He stated that

There is a general consensus in Hong Kong that the basic role of the government in the economy is to provide the framework for markets to operate effectively, and to act when there are obvious imperfections

in the operation of the market mechanism.

(Tsang, 2006)

In the 1960s, poverty was perceived as a consequence of the devastation of World War Two and the subsequent influx of refugees from Mainland China. Though poverty then was a widespread social phenomenon, it was instead portrayed by the government as a need to provide relief or material assistance for the destitute, who were perceived as the few unfortunate individuals (Hong Kong Government, 1961).

This belief in viewing poverty as a personal issue, neglecting a broader sense of structural causes, was even more prominent in the 1970s, since a vast majority of the poor population has indeed benefited from the escalation of economy, as suggested by the extremely low unemployment rate (Chiu, 2003). This provided a sound foundation for the implementation of the non-contributory but means-tested public assistance scheme in Hong Kong in 1971. This cash assistance for individuals and families with inadequate resources replaced the in-kind relief in the 1960s. This scheme has changed its name to Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) in 1992. And this residual income maintenance program has continued to be the main strategy in dealing with the least advantaged or most vulnerable population throughout the remaining century. Rates have been adjusted upward and more vulnerable groups have been included throughout the years (see Table 2.1). However, the dominant schema in addressing poverty as solely a personal or family failure or misfortune remains unaltered.

Table 2.1

Chronological Development of Social Assistance and Allowances in Hong Kong, 1971 to 2003

Year	Content of Development
1971	The Government assumed responsibility in helping those least able to help themselves by launching the Public Assistance Scheme, which was a means-tested system of cash benefits paid on a family basis. This was the first time that social security appeared in the form of cash payments.
1973	Introduction of disability and infirmity allowances, which provided non-means-tested, flat-rate and non-contributory cash assistance for the severely disabled and those aged 75 and over. In addition, the compensation schemes: Criminal and law enforcement injuries scheme and emergency relief were introduced in the form of non-contributory lump sum payment.
1978	Introduction of the old age supplement, long-term supplement. Extension of old age allowance to those 70 years old and above. Extension of disability allowance to the profoundly deaf. Establishment of the Social Security Appeal Board.
1987	Old age allowance was extended to those who were 65 years of age.
1992	Public Assistance changed its name to Comprehensive Social Security Assistance.
1995	A new supplement of HK\$215 per month was introduced for single parent families. The maximum level of monthly disregarded earnings was raised to HK\$1,210 per person. In addition, the first month's income of certain groups of recipients (the elderly, the disabled and family carers) was disregarded when they got full-time jobs.
1996	A flat-rate grant for selected items of school related expenses for students was introduced.
1997	The Portable Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme was implemented, whereby elderly CSSA recipients who meet the prescribed criteria would be allowed to continue receiving their monthly standard rate payment and annual long-term supplement should they choose to leave Hong Kong to take up permanent residence in Guangdong.
1999	The 'Support for Self-reliance Scheme' was implemented to encourage and assist unemployed CSSA recipients to regain employment and move towards self-reliance. The scheme comprised three components, namely Active Employment Assistance (AEA) program, Community Work (CW) program and the provision of Disregarded Earnings. If the unemployed CSSA

recipients failed to observe the rules in the Scheme, that is actively seek work in accordance with the requirements or refuses an offer of job interview without good reasons, their CSSA payment would be terminated.

Single parents were required to join the scheme when their youngest child reaches the age of twelve.

2000 A further relaxation of disregarded earnings for able-bodied CSSA recipients.

2001 The Social Welfare Department has secured a fund of HK\$43 million to implement a Promoting Self-Reliance Strategy. It comprised of two projects: the Special Job Attachment (SJA) Program and the Intensive Employment Assistance (IEA) Fund.

2002 Ending Exclusion Project was implemented to assist single parent families with young children to maximize their chances of participating in social and economic activities and integrating into society by means of employment.

2003 The standard rates of CSSA and the disability allowance would be reduced by 11.1%

CSSA for elderly people has been cut from HK\$2,555 to HK\$2,400 a month.

Disability allowance has been reduced from HK\$1,260 and HK\$2,520 to HK\$1,120 and HK\$2,240 a month.

Maximum rent allowance for a family of four has been cut from HK\$4,210 to HK\$3,545 a month.

Education expenses for primary school pupils have been cut from HK\$2,715 to HK\$2,505 a month.

The eligibility for CSSA and SSA would be tightened to those who have lived for up to seven years in Hong Kong, but no restrictions would be put on the under-18s.

The Intensive Employment Assistance Program (IEAP) was launched.

Note. From Hong Kong Government (Various years). *Hong Kong Annual Report*. Hong Kong: The Government Printer.

Subsequent to the Asian Financial Crisis, the labour market responded accordingly, news of layoffs quickly emerged, the unemployment rate has escalated from below 3% in 1997 to more than 6% within two years and nearly reached 8% in 2003 (see Figure 2.3), and this was followed by wage cuts, in which the manufacturing and the retail sectors experienced the most substantial fall in wages.

The originally vulnerable groups were even more vulnerable, causing an increasing number of people to fall into the safety net of the social security scheme. The total CSSA caseload has increased from 166,720 in 1996/97 to 296,688 in 2004/05 (see Table 2.2), in which the percentage of the unemployment and low earnings category has the largest increase, from 9% to 14.9% and from 1.9% to 5.7% respectively (see Table 2.2); while the total expenditure of CSSA has increased by more than twofold within these nine years (Census and Statistics Department, 2005)³.

³ Since Hong Kong has no official poverty line, the government and society often refer to the CSSA caseloads in describing the magnitude of poverty. However, this measurement often underestimated the prevalence of poverty (Wong, 2000; MacPherson, 2001). Wong and Chua (1996) used the income proxy measure to analyze poverty and estimated that 141,000 non-CSSA households were living in abject poverty; MacPherson and Lo (1997) used the standard budget approach and found that 126,600 non-CSSA households had living standards below the minimum acceptable level.

Table 2.2 *Classification and Trend of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Cases*

Year	Type of Cases										Total no. of cases
	Old age	Blind	Deaf	Physically disabled	Mentally ill	Ill Health	Single parent family	Low earnings	Unemployment	Others	
1992/93	65.1%	1.0%	0.3%	2.5%	6.0%	10.8%	6.0%	1.2%	3.6%	3.4%	81 975
1993/94	64.2%	1.0%	0.4%	2.8%	6.0%	10.6%	6.0%	1.5%	4.1%	3.1%	95 104
1994/95	66.2%	0.4%	0.1%	1.8%	5.3%	10.3%	6.0%	1.0%	4.8%	4.2%	109 461
1995/96	61.9%	0.3%	0.1%	1.9%	5.1%	10.6%	6.6%	1.3%	7.4%	4.8%	136 201
1996/97	59.2%	0.3%	0.1%	1.9%	4.7%	10.8%	8.0%	1.9%	9.0%	4.1%	166 720
1997/98	57.3%	0.3%	0.1%	1.9%	4.5%	11.0%	8.8%	2.4%	9.8%	4.1%	195 645
1998/99	53.4%	0.2%	0.1%	1.9%	4.2%	10.8%	11.0%	3.2%	13.7%	1.6%	232 819
1999/00	58.4%	0.1%	0.1%	1.2%	3.7%	8.8%	11.0%	3.5%	11.5%	1.7%	228 015
2000/01	59.3%	0.1%	0.1%	1.5%	3.8%	8.4%	11.4%	3.6%	10.2%	1.6%	228 263
2001/02	56.4%	0.1%	0.1%	1.6%	3.7%	8.1%	12.0%	3.7%	12.8%	1.5%	247 192
2002/03	52.8%	0.1%	0.1%	1.6%	3.7%	7.7%	12.6%	4.0%	15.9%	1.5%	271 893
2003/04	50.7%	0.1%	0.1%	1.6%	3.7%	7.7%	13.1%	4.9%	16.7%	1.5%	290 705
2004/05	50.7%	0.1%	0.1%	1.6%	3.8%	7.9%	13.4%	5.7%	14.9%	1.7%	296 688

Note. From Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR (Various years). *Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics.* Hong Kong: Government Printer.

2.4 The Paradox

Doubtless to say, economic recession would make the already vulnerable individuals even more vulnerable, however, economic fragility is not a sole problem for the working poor, the government is simultaneously suffering from huge budget deficits. Hong Kong renowned by its narrow tax base, profits tax and earnings tax already account for about 40% of its total operating government revenue. Thus in times of economic recessions, the fiscal budget would inevitably suffer heavy blows (see Table 2.3). In view of the tapering revenue, pressures in scaling back public expenditure could be well expected. Interestingly but unfortunately, it is always a paradox when social services and statutory welfare programs seem unsustainable; the greater are our demands for social protection and vice versa. It is thus apparently crucial to ask whether this paradox could be resolved and how it could be achieved. Could Hong Kong restore its unceasing resilience once again? And how could the welfare sector respond to the surging demand for welfare with a tightening budget?

Table 2.3***Hong Kong Government's Reserve Balances, 1985-2004***

Year	Surplus (\$ million)	Deficit	Year	Surplus (\$ million)	Deficit
1985	2 850		1995		3113
1986	5 899		1996	25 678	
1987	12 502		1997	86 866	
1988	16 066		1998		23 241
1989	11 064		1999	9 952	
1990	3 967		2000		7 833
1991	22 509		2001		63 331
1992	21 979		2002		61 688
1993	19 164		2003		40 128
1994	10 843		2004	21 356	

Note. Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR (Various years). *Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.

CHAPTER THREE

WELFARE DEBATE

In order to find an answer to the above question, it is essential to trace the major developments of conceptions of welfare. Efforts have been devoted to distinguish and classify welfare states according to their public-private mix, state-market nexus, level of decommodification etc., for instance, Richard Titmuss's (1974) pioneering work of the residual-institutional model, George and Wilding's (1976) spectrum from anti-collectivists to the Marxists and Esping-Andersen's (1990) 'Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism'. These models and typologies were largely normative and parsimonious. They could only portray static societies at one point in time and pure models hardly exist in the real world (Esping-Andersen, 1999), however, it provides indispensable value-based ideologies for us in assessing and evaluating social phenomena. In review of the different distinctions, it was found that two major camps, namely the New Right Advocates and the Social Democratic Camp, have dominated the debate of ideology or conception of welfare in the past century.

3.1 Social Democratic Welfare Regimes

3.1.1 Essential Characteristics

Democratic Socialism was largely motivated by the goal of egalitarianism which had its roots in Christianity and Marxism (George & Wilding, 1993). It not only aimed at relieving social distress and hardships (Crosland, 1956) but also promoting altruism and social integration in society (Titmuss, 1970). Its distinctive features include the universal and comprehensive risk coverage, generous benefit levels and most importantly, the decommodification of social rights, in other words, to minimize or wholly abolish market dependency (Esping-Andersen, 1999), because the social democrats view markets essentially as inequitable and thus fails to provide rights that ought to be alienable. Moreover, full employment is also an integral commitment to this welfare regime for the state has to maximize its revenue and minimize its social problems to ensure the sustainability of a highly universalistic and decommodifying welfare system (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

3.1.2 The Rise and Fall of the Welfare State

It is indeed difficult to identify one single causal factor or coherent theory in explaining the origin and development of welfare states, scholars would rather view its development as an interaction of multiple factors. Tawney (1931) stated that industrial civilization together with a simultaneous development of political democracy was essential for its creation. O'Connor (1973) similarly argued that the existence of welfare state was a natural consequence of the capitalist mode of production for contradictions would arise, pressing for social reforms. The majority of the population then was comprised of the working class; thus growing strength of the labour in the civil society has encouraged forces of the Left to expand. This persuasion and pressurization was argued as leading to the successful creation of welfare state and hence democratic socialism (Crosland, 1956). Moreover, pragmatic concerns in the aftermaths of wars also instill the development of social democratic welfare states. In the post-Second World War period, industrialization sprouted and emerged alongside with many social problems. These included health care, education, housing and sanitation, all pressing social agendas urging the governments to respond systematically with the creation of extensive social programs. These all paved way for the development of the social democratic welfare state, where social

benefits and services are regarded as universal and as a right to all, and that the state should assume responsibility in maintaining an adequate minimum standard of living for all citizens. The welfare state model has once gained legitimacy in the Western world in times of buoyant economy, when the state could legitimately exercise her power to achieve egalitarian objectives (Mishra, 1984). However, during periods of economic stagflation (i.e., economic stagnation accompanied by high rates of inflation) and fiscal crisis of the state in the 1970s, unemployment has been climbing almost everywhere, and the usual high level of state intervention in providing social services resulted in an increasingly unaffordable burden on public expenditure. As a result, governments failed to keep their promises, for instance, the goal of full employment was first to be abandoned by many governments. The welfare state model with extensive welfare coverage was jeopardized and thus challenged by subsequent conservative governments, for example, Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

3.2 The New Right

‘Mass unemployment, cutbacks in social expenditure and tax concessions to the rich are a harsh reminder that welfare is only tolerable so long as it does not interfere

with the logic of capitalist production' (Mishra, 1984, p. 24). It is the material condition i.e., the advent of economic stagflation, rather than the ideational reason that caused neo-liberal economists to gain currency (Mishra, 1990). However, their value premises in anti-collectivism was not new, it was indeed rooted in the classical liberal political economy. They advocated a pure form of capitalism, which upholds the rigour of free market economy with minimal state intervention. As anti-collectivists, the idea of government failure is central to their evaluation of welfare state. A profound classical liberalist, Adam Smith (1961), stated that only market could essentially abolish class and inequality; and that state intervention, other than the necessary minimum, would only hamper the equalizing process of competition inherent in the market. Liberalists argued that the unintended consequences of government intervention account for an important source of government failure, as Charles Murray (1984, p. 9) wrote, 'we tried to provide more for the poor and produced more poor instead. We tried to remove the barriers to escape from poverty and inadvertently built a trap'. The well-known side-effect of the welfare state – welfare dependency, has been perceived as economically as well as socially damaging (Mead, 1986).

Under this context, many nations were heavily influenced by neo-liberalism in

the past two decades, believing that state intervention in the provision of social welfare could impede economic growth. Economic and efficiency considerations hence dominated the entire social policy debates, and privatization and commoditization of social services became a practice norm elsewhere. They believe that economic growth would naturally enhance the social development of the population. However, some scholars though noted a direction of change in the New Right governance; they observed that the magnitude of change remains small and that universal social programs characterized in welfare states remain largely intact (Glennerster, 1991; Mishra, 1990). Piven and Cloward (1985, p. 157) stated that 'widespread enthusiasm for the strategy of abolishing the welfare state and tightening other peoples' belts has not been translated into results of more than a marginal scope'.

If the New Right Ideology exerted dominance everywhere, its adverse impacts cannot be missed. Midgley (1991) argued that the idea that society had inherent mechanisms for automatically correcting economic and social dysfunctions does not stand. Instead, problems of poverty, unemployment as well as income inequities have worsened despite economic growth for tax cuts often generated a massive redistribution of income in favour of the wealthy (Leckachem, 1982; Loney, 1986;

Phillips, 1990) and that the deregulation advocated by the New Right has not ended the trend towards monopolization; instead of freeing market forces, mergers and takeovers have been a distinctive feature of the New Right, thus further concentrating economic power (Midgley, 1991). Haworth (1994) argued that the free market, just like the state can be another invisible tyrannical ruler, which is antithetical to the very freedom it advocates. The fundamental social policy goals in meeting social needs and promoting human well-being were hence undermined. The myth of a free market economy offered no solution to poverty, but had instead aggravated the economic fragility of the working poor (Glennerster, 1991; Karger, 1991). The problem of poverty does not merely cause suffering of individual families, but also incurs tremendous social cost.

3.3 The Social Development Approach as an Alternative

In the wave of globalization, new opportunities are also accompanied by new risks and higher fragility for both states and individuals. There is certainly a need to carve out new relationships between the state and the society as the preexisting dominant ideologies lost their resonance: 'the old left resisted that change. The new right did not want to manage it' (Giddens, 1998, p. 1). New revitalizing ideas thus emerged. For instance, the pragmatic Middle Way Approach which believes in 'a

middle way between unregulated capitalism and unrestrained collectivism', which means that they actually uphold the free market system as the best way in economic organization, but simultaneously believe that the market would malfunction and needs management or control (George & Wilding, 1993). Another less pragmatic but more intellectual political ideology that came into scene in the midst of the debate between state welfarism and neo-liberalism was the Third Way defined by Anthony Giddens (1998). He was indeed advocating a modernized centre-left position, embracing globalization but simultaneously upholding social justice, compromising modernization and conservatism, transcending the equality concept from unconditional rights to no rights without responsibilities, aiming at balancing equality and individual freedom.

While the Third Way is more an ideology in the political context, another alternative, which has a much more detailed discussion in the actual implementation particularly in the social welfare arena – Midgley's Social Development Model – would be highlighted and adopted as the normative stance in the current study. Midgley (1995, p. 25) defined social development as 'a process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development'. In the past, social

welfare has been dominated by the traditional residualist-institutionalist dichotomy. The residualist approach views government assistance as the last resort for the neediest population only; whereas the institutional approach advocates extensive state involvement in all aspects of social services (Wilensky & Lebeaux, 1965; Titmuss, 1974). In the midst of the debate, the 'Social Development' alternative emerged, arguing that both approaches are subsidiary and dependent on the economy, rendering shaky and unsatisfactory relationship between social welfare and the economy. The Social Development Approach thus aims at transcending the residual and institutional approach to a developmental perspective of social welfare, which actively harmonizes both economic and social objectives, in a wider development process, by promoting investment oriented and productivist social programs.

This approach is inclusive and universalistic in nature, helping the population as a whole. Moreover, social development is particularly concerned with those who are neglected by economic growth or excluded from development, such as the inner city poor, impoverished rural dwellers, ethnic minorities and women (Midgley, 1995). This was done by transcending the remedial and maintenance-oriented programs to productivist programs that will assist the marginalized to integrate into the mainstream economy. This unique approach is also regarded as the social investment

approach to social welfare.

This approach could be realized in a number of ways as suggested by Midgley and Tang (2001). They are *human capital programs* that invest in people's nutritional standards, health conditions and educational skills especially amongst the least disadvantaged, whose life chances have been seriously impeded. Becker (1964) acknowledged that the human capital programs not only produced positive effects on individual beneficiaries but on the society as a whole. Secondly, there are *programs that emphasize employment or self-employment*, aiming at helping the welfare recipients to participate in the labour market to an extent in order to achieve self-sufficiency, reduce welfare dependency and increase tax revenues. Thirdly, there are *programs that invest in social capital formation*, which aim at promoting community integration through creation and expansion of local productive economic development initiatives. Furthermore, *individual asset accumulation* is encouraged, in which incentives are created to encourage the poor to save. This aims at moving the welfare dependents away from basic subsistence living which the traditional income maintenance programs has maintained, to better self-sufficiency (Sherraden, 1991). Finally, barriers to economic participation such as unaffordable day care and discrimination should be removed; and social programs should be subjected to

cost-benefit, cost-effectiveness as well as efficiency tests.

A significant impetus in promoting this approach was achieved at the United Nations World Summit on Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995. It was the first time in history that the heads of State and Government gathered to recognize the significance of social development and human well-being for all and to give to these goals the highest priority. The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development indicated a unanimous agreement that economic development and social development are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development. It also recognized that economic growth in the context of sustainable development is necessary to maintain social justice, and that social development is central to the needs and aspirations of people throughout the world (United Nations, 1995).

Its innovative compromise between the left and the right, its focus on the overall well-being of the population and its detailed discussion in the social welfare arena sufficiently explain why this study is adopting this normative Model as a lens to evaluate the IEAP.

CHAPTER FOUR

GOVERNMENTS' RESPONSES IN THE WEST

This Chapter explains how workfare programs gained publicity in the West either out of pragmatic / imperative concerns or out of awareness for an ideological transformation in the social welfare arena. The major debates concerning the actual implementation across different states, namely the mandatory versus voluntary and education-first versus work-first approach are scrutinized. And the effectiveness in achieving its predominant goal of self-sufficiency in the United States is also analyzed.

4.1 Workfare Programs Gaining Currency

After a review on the dominant theoretical debates and the social development model as a normative theory in response to the dispute, we now focus on how governments in various countries actually responded to the paradox. Under the waning context of state welfarism as discussed in Chapter Three, social rights

without obligations were highly questioned and reducing welfare expenditure has continued to become a worldwide concern. Workfare programs / policies that oblige welfare recipients to engage in work or to participate in work-related activities (for instance, skills training, job searching, job placements etc.) as an essential condition for receiving welfare benefits, thus gained publicity in most countries. The idea of passive provision of income maintenance has been overhauled by the replacement of an increasing emphasis on obligations to work in exchange for financial aid (Lødemel, 2000). It not only legitimately attacked welfare fraud but also miraculously transformed welfare recipients into productive citizens (Quaid, 2002). Such a major shift in the welfare sector was not only applicable to states undergoing fiscal crisis and problems of unemployment, but signified a shift to the ideology of activation; for countries such as Denmark and Norway, free from pressing problems of unemployment and crisis, also welcomed and adopted the new approach. Moreover, both the left and right proponents found favour in this new alternative as it could tackle the problem of welfare abuse, and was humane, on the other hand, as it could reintegrate the socially excluded back into the society (Handler, 2004). Though these activation programs could be dressed in different disguises as would be discussed in the coming sections, its attachment to the labour market and orientation on human capital development is indeed in line with the realization strategies in the

Social Development Approach suggested by Midgley and Tang (2001).

4.1.1 Origin and Development of Workfare Programs in the West

When one started to trace the history of workfare or welfare-to-work, one would find that the United States could be considered as its birthplace. The concept of work for welfare recipients had germinated long since 1967, as a strategy for reducing the Aid to Families with Dependant Children (AFDC) caseloads and hence expenditure. The AFDC has been a major welfare program in the United States since the 1930s aiming at assisting single mothers with children. It was originally designed as a permanent entitlement and that no work requirement was needed. However, this condition has come to a watershed when the Work Incentive Program (WIN) has been implemented, which made mandatory the registration of every appropriate AFDC recipient for work and training. In 1981, President Ronald Reagan took a step further, replacing the idea of requiring recipients to mere register for employment or training with a more specific obligation, i.e., to actually engage them in activities that help increase their employment potential. This was realized through legislation, known as the Omnibus and Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA). Under this Act, the Community Work Experience Program (CWEP) had to be enforced in all states,

mandating AFDC recipients to participate in recognized community work programs as an essential condition in receiving benefits (Rein, 1982; Quaid, 2002). In addition to this national program, individual states were encouraged to develop their own programs, thus resulting in a wide assortment of schemes, for instance, Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) in Riverside, California; Jobs for Employable Dependent Individuals (JEDI) in Maryland; Michigan Opportunities for Skills and Training (MOST) in Michigan etc. They varied widely from highly traditional / mandatory to largely voluntary approaches, however, they included all or some of the following components, namely job search, education and training, child care services and transportation allowances (Rose, 1995). Despite the effort, welfare caseloads still continued to rise steadily throughout the 1980s, thus Reagan took one step further as realized in the 1988 Family Support Act (FSA) and its subsequent Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program. Under these measures, participation requirements were increased and provision of employment services was emphasized. It also imposed sanctions and obligations on both the recipient and the state if either of them failed to comply. Nevertheless, welfare rolls has not stopped to expand, but has increased in an even faster rate. Hence during Clinton's administration, he signed a welfare reform Bill called the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996 (Quaid, 2002). Temporary Assistance for

Needy Families (TANF) replaced AFDC, and recipients were obliged to find paid employment as quickly as possible. A five-year lifetime limit was also introduced on welfare benefits and the states have to put at least half their caseloads to work within six years or else the state would be financially penalized. Workfare has evidently been pushed up the ladder of the policy agenda, conveying the message that welfare has been transformed to a means of transition to employment (Quaid, 2002).

Its neighbouring country, Canada has also turned towards workfare. Though it emerged in a later stage than in the United States, the background and purpose were similar. It sprouted in the 1970s and 1980s when the government was facing fiscal challenge together with a simultaneous expanding demand of public services, thus the ultimate purpose for the welfare reform was to control ever rising costs. However, unlike the United States, management of the welfare system in Canada is not federally controlled, thus reform strategies varied across provinces (Quaid, 2002). The Ontario Works and the Mandatory 'Voluntary Opportunities' in Ontario and Alberta respectively have been largely influenced by the American-style mandatory and 'work-first' concept. However, another province, New Brunswick, has been conducting a somewhat different kind of 'learnfare' program, known as NB Works. This is a voluntary education / training program for single mothers on welfare. The

focus on retraining revealed their underlying assumption that their main barrier to a successful career is inadequate education.

At the other side of the Atlantic, something rather different has emerged. The social democratic welfare states such as Sweden and Denmark's Active Labour Market Programs (ALMPs) have placed greater emphasis on the long-term development of human capital rather than on immediate job placement and are predominantly voluntary in nature. However, Norway's 'Work Line' and Britain's 'New Deal' have adopted a workfare approach at the opposite end of the spectrum. Their compulsory and 'work-first' orientations were considered to be highly Americanized, emphasizing rapid job placement disregarding the quality or wage levels of the work (Daguerre, 2004).

4.1.2 Debates in the Rhetoric of Workfare

Workfare has indeed existed for many years and has been dressed in many different disguises as illustrated above. These varied outlooks have led the rhetoric of workfare to undergo a few major debates. First, there came the voluntary versus mandatory debate, which some referred to as carrot versus stick, or even educative

versus punitive policies, which goes a step further in suggesting its effects.

4.1.2.1 Mandatory versus Voluntary

The advocates of the mandatory perspective believe in the 'culture of poverty' or 'welfare as dependency' ideology, assuming that poor people were characterized by a set of values not only distinct from but also inferior to that of the middle class. Rein (1974) supported this characterization and found that among lower-class welfare recipients, benefits were not only used but were considered acceptable. This conception is largely in line with the neo-liberal approach, as Murray (1984) and Mead (1986) had suggested that poverty is neither a consequence of social inequality nor jobs shortage, but the result of welfare dependency and low work ethic. Proponents of this concept view welfare programs as a means to combat welfare dependency and to promote work incentive as a personal obligation, thus it is considered as a moral rather than an economic matter (Mead, 1992). While at the other side of the debate, the campaigners of voluntary programs criticized that the mere acceptance of the 'culture of poverty' as an explanation of people needing social assistance ignores structural (e.g. structure of labour market, discrimination etc.) as well as personal barriers (health problems, lack of child care support etc.) to work

(Handler & Hasenfeld, 1991). Moreover, researchers have not found differences in attitudes towards work between welfare recipients and non-recipients (Dolinsky, Caputo & O'Kane, 1989; Duncan & Hoffman, 1988; Downey & Moen, 1987; Corcoran, Duncan, Gurin & Gurin, 1985). In contrast, there were empirical evidences suggesting that motivation to work was in fact as strong as ever, especially among young people in post-industrial societies, where identity was confirmed by 'what we do' instead of 'who we are' (Beck, 1998). Still another interesting study conducted in Europe by Gallie and Alm (2000) suggested that the generosity of welfare provision had very little influence on people's employment commitment. And yet the most generous regimes in terms of welfare provision had the highest level of employment commitment. Kildal (1999) therefore concluded that 'the economic incentive to work may be strengthened when the alternative is hunger, it does not mean that the motivation to work is lessened by a full stomach'. In view of the absence of convincing evidence in favour of workfare programs to be mandatory and punitive, proponents of the opposing camp thus criticized the moral ambiguity of deterrent workfare strategies in transforming work into something detestable, which obscures and hampers its educational objective. They thus supported voluntary workfare programs, in which work would be perceived as an asset rather than punishment (Kildal, 1999; Gewirth, 1996; Leone & O'Hare, 1989).

4.1.2.2 *Work-first versus Education-first*

Another persistent debate is the 'education-first' versus 'work-first' dispute. This dispute is indeed asking what kind of welfare programs, education / training or job placement will best prepare welfare recipients to achieve self-sufficiency in the labour market. In fact, throughout the past few decades, welfare programs all round the world have been fluctuating between investing in programs emphasizing on skills training and immediate job placement. Adherents of the 'work-first' approach believe that 'welfare recipients can best build their work habits and skills and move up to better positions in the workplace, even if their initial jobs are not high-paying, long-lasting or particularly desirable' (Hamilton et al., 1997), thus they virtually encourage recipients to take any available jobs; while 'education-first' supporters believe that when more resources were invested in basic education or skills training, recipients would have higher opportunity in obtaining better and more stable jobs and hence less likely to revert back to welfare rolls. This has been largely influenced by Becker's (1975) human capital theory. Becker examined how resources in people would influence their future monetary and psychic income. He made his analysis by calculating the differential returns on investment of human capital, namely, education, on-the-job training, information and health. And he concluded that education has by

far the strongest influence on earning differences. Moreover, it is a well-known fact that better educated or skilled workers are less likely to be out of job than their unskilled counterparts. Acs, Loprest and Roberts (2001) also found that education and quality of skills were the best predictor of employment. This explains why human capital especially educational investment has been adopted as a strategy in welfare-to-work programs as the perfect solution for welfare recipients to stand on their own feet.

Nevertheless, numerous studies assessing the effects of human capital investment in workfare programs have shown that human capital investments were indeed more costly and yield lower levels of success when compared with alternative approaches (D'Amico, 1997; Manski & Garfinkel, 1992; Riccio, Goldman, Hamilton, Martinson & Orenstein, 1989). This phenomenon is not only found in the United States, but in all industrialized countries:

A growing body of research, comparing groups of unemployed people who enter government training schemes with those who do not, found that the schemes fail to improve either the earnings or the employment prospects of their clients. After surveying the results of various broadly based training programs for unemployed adults, the training-friendly OECD

concluded in 1994 that there is 'remarkably meagre support for the hypothesis that such programs are effective'

Economist (1996, p. 19)

The proponents for human capital development, however, suggested some rival explanations. For instance, human capital programs undeniably could not produce the same increases in employment and earnings or decreases in welfare rolls in the short run when compared with work-first / labour force attachment programs (Hamilton et al., 1997; Fein et al., 1998; Scrivener et al., 1998; Freedman, Knab, Gennetian & Navarro, 2000). Moreover, Brodsky and Ovwigho (2002) pointed out that the relatively more promising short-term gains of the work-first programs may not readily lead to long-term employment, thus suggesting that short-term employment may not be the best measure of success. Michaloponlos, Schwartz and Adams-Ciardullo's (2000) evaluation of 20 welfare-to-work programs provided evidence to this claim, for they concluded that differences in earnings ceased being statistically significant within three years. Hence Brodsky and Ovwigho (2002) further suggested that in order to accurately assess and identify promising strategies in real poverty alleviation, multiple and sequential outcomes should be analyzed in evaluating the long-term effectiveness of welfare reform.

4.1.3 Common Goals shared by various Orientations

Disregarding how they are dressed and whether their primary emphases were on work or training, they share one common goal, which is to enable unemployed but 'employable' welfare recipients to achieve self-sufficiency through reintegration into the unsubsidized labour market. Individual human beings could not in any ways attain self-sufficiency in sociological terms. Therefore, in such context, self-sufficiency is not referred to in its purest form, but a publicly recognized level through performance of a social function – work. The contextual meaning of self-sufficiency is thus derived from a social contingency model, meaning freedom from dependency on society, and to be more specific is to live without welfare benefits, but that does not necessarily imply total independence in all aspects (Daugherty & Barber, 2001).

4.1.4 Effectiveness of Workfare Programs

As discussed earlier, workfare programs in the United States had a much longer history and its development more mature, while that in most European countries were relatively recent, hence the 'interpretations and conclusions are tentative'

(Handler, 2004). Therefore, in this section, mainly the effectiveness of the workfare programs in the United States and its experience, especially since the enactment of the PRWORA, is reviewed.

4.1.4.1 *The Bright Side*

Since the attainment of self-sufficiency is the predominant goal of workfare programs, studies on the evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs were mainly providing data on its impacts on caseloads of welfare rolls, poverty and employment rates etc. It seems that there were a considerable amount of literature applauding its success and claiming victory as in the early stages of the reform, from 1996 to 2000, welfare caseloads were dramatically reduced by more than 50%, a declining poverty rate especially among children was recorded, and employment rate for single mothers were rising significantly (Jencks, Swingle & Winship, 2006; Rodgers, 2005; Bell, 2001; Blank, 2000; Figlio & Ziliak, 1999). Some also argued that the success of the welfare reform was due to its not standing-alone, for instance the boosting economy, rising wages, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and child care subsidies etc. all contribute to its success (Jencks, Swingle & Winship, 2006; Beamer, 2005; Lemke, Witt, Queralto & Witte, 2000). Other than the above

institutional and structural success factors, program factors could also be another determining factor, for instance, the employment-focused approach was found to be more effective than the education-focused approach (Michalopoulos, Schwartz & Adams-Ciardullo, 2000; Hamilton et al., 1997). Other personal facilitating factors include higher educational attainment, better skilled (Acs, Loprest & Roberts, 2001), and cohabitation was also found to improve the chance of successful employment, perhaps suggesting a higher chance and capability in balancing job requirements and family responsibilities (Danziger, Helfin, Corcoran, Oltmans & Wang, 2002).

4.1.4.2 The Dark Side

However, the dark side of the picture was that after the economic recession in 2001, while unemployment rate was still surging and official poverty rate increased, the TANF caseloads continued to decline by over 10% monthly (Murray & Primus, 2005) and Loprest (2003) found that the ex-recipients who could not find job has indeed increased between 2000 and 2002 when compared with 1997 and 1999, indicating that the TANF was losing its function as a safety net. Moreover, for the working ex-recipients or welfare leavers, their earnings were just about the same as that from welfare and Food Stamps (Michalopoulos, Schwartz & Adams-Ciardullo,

2000). They continued to be underpaid, still living in poverty, have little chance of promotion and have almost as much difficulty balancing their budgets as they had been on welfare (Bryner & Martin, 2005; Grogger, Karoly & Klerman, 2002; Moffit & Roff, 2000; Cancian, Haveman, Meyer & Wolfe, 2000; Bernstein, 1999; Burtless, 1999; Edin & Lein, 1997; Bacarov, 1993). Besides the structural barriers in the labour market such as low wages and lack opportunity for upward mobility (Holzer, 1998; Bencivenga & Smith, 1997; Smith, 1997); factors like depression, low-self-efficacy (Michalopoulos, Schwartz & Adams-Ciardullo, 2000), chemical dependency, health problems (Jayakody & Danziger, 2000; Olson & Pavetti, 1996) and women suffering from domestic violence (Zedlewski & Loprest, 2001; Danziger, Corcoran & Helfin, 2000; Sable, Libbus, Huneke & Anger, 1999) were all factors inhibiting successful employment. Thus welfare reform in the US was not as successful as it often claims.

CHAPTER FIVE

HONG KONG GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSES TO THE PARADOX

This Chapter turns the lens back to Hong Kong, examining how the Hong Kong government responded to the economic setback and hence the simultaneous fiscal deficit and the surging unemployment and CSSA caseloads. It mainly focuses on discussing the different landmarks of workfare initiatives throughout the past decade, which serves as a backdrop for the current study.

5.1 Multi-directional Interventions

Hong Kong as discussed earlier has also been undergoing a similar paradox as that in the West – fiscal challenge together with a swelling pressure on welfare rolls. Hong Kong government's response to the many challenges brought about by the economic setback since 1997 has basically been in line with the 'big market, small government' philosophy for it was believed that Hong Kong's successful transformation from a modest trading port to a world-class financial center

throughout the past few decades was not a result of bureaucratic blueprints but rather relied on economic impetus and market initiatives in the private sector. Thus, government's intervention was predominantly in the form of a proactive market enabler in providing maximum support in upholding open and fair competition in the market and stabilizing the economy. Measures to stabilize and stimulate economic growth include stabilizing the linked exchange currency system, privatizing public corporations, reviving tourism and attracting foreign investment, for instance the Cyberport and the Disneyland Project and to make the most advantage out of China's increasingly open market by reinforcing economic partnership with neighbours like Guangdong Province and the Pearl River Delta (Tong, 2002; Leung, 2001; Leung, 2000; Tsang, 1999; Tsang, 1998).

Besides the stimulation of the economy, the continual surging unemployment rate (see Figure 2.3) made the government invest in job creation and human capital development, for instance the enhancement of Youth Pre-employment Training Program, programs in Vocational Training Council, bridging programs by the Federation of Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions, and the training capacity of the Employees Retraining Board (Leung, 2000; Tsang, 1999). These government initiatives were all crisis-driven, reactive and ad hoc in nature instead of

well-planned and long-term endeavours. Moreover, some of these attempts, for instance, the training programs provided for youths could keep them engaged and hence artificially lowered the unemployment rate.

5.2 Workfare Initiatives

With all the above measures, the expanding and increasingly unsustainable pressure on the expenditure of social security in Hong Kong was alarming and worrying (see Table 2.2). And thus it prompted the review of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme in 1998 (Social Welfare Department, 1998) which suggested the implementation of the Support for Self-reliance Scheme (SFS). It is explicit that the concept of workfare, which demands that welfare recipients be required to work as a condition of receiving their welfare entitlements, began to take ground. The Scheme was implemented to encourage and assist unemployed CSSA recipients to regain employment and move towards self-reliance (Social Welfare Department, 2006a). In its early implementation, it comprised three components, namely, active employment assistance (AEA), additional help by way of community work (CW), and incentives to work through the provision of disregarded earnings (DE) (see Table 5.2).

The Social Welfare Department especially conducted an evaluation of this SFS Scheme targeting at the unemployed recipients for CSSA. The evaluation was predominantly a quantitative one, gathering information from administrative records, databases and a longitudinal survey⁴, aiming at obtaining aggregate data on the success of the effectiveness of the program. For the AEA program, the administrative records indicated that up to November 2000, only 25.6% of the participants got gainful employment, of which 38.5% could earn enough to obtain self-reliance, while the remaining 61.5% continued to receive CSSA as low earners. The remaining 74.4% dropped out either because they failed to comply with the obligations, refused to remain registered or withdrawn with various or unknown reasons. The database supplied by the SWD enabled the comparison of the profile of successful job seekers among AEA and non-AEA participants (Social Welfare Department, 2001). Overall speaking, there were no differences between the two groups. The figures indicated that 22% more non-AEA CSSA recipients could manage to exit the CSSA net when compared with AEA participants, however, 19% more AEA participants has changed their CSSA status to low earnings, indicated that more AEA participants have taken up jobs with less attractive remuneration. Moreover, it seems that the AEA is more successful with younger and better-educated recipients. For the CW program, the

⁴ Its outcome measures are 1) success in regaining employment; 2) improved awareness of social responsibilities; 3) improved awareness of need to re-establish self-reliance; and 4) understanding the importance of employment (Social Welfare Department, 2001).

survey results showed that over half of the respondents agreed that the program has made them realized their responsibility in serving the community, widened their social circles and kept them from idling at home, while 27% opined that the program made them lose face (Social Welfare Department, 2001).

In order to reinforce this work ethic ideology, the SWD has secured \$43 million from the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council to implement a Promoting Self-Reliance Strategy in 2001. It comprised of two projects: the Special Job Attachment (SJA) Program and the Intensive Employment Assistance (IEA) Fund (see Table 5.2). However, the figures released from the SWD revealed that the entire scheme was not as satisfactory. Until May 2003, 42.1% of the SJA and 40.7% of the IEA participants have successfully found a job, however, of which 49.4% and 55.3% respectively could only secure a part-time employment. As for the CSSA recipients, 42.1% of the SJA and 68% of the IEA participants still remained trapped in the unemployment category of the CSSA net, while 30.9% and 14.4% respectively experienced a change of status from unemployment to low earnings category within the CSSA net, with a remainder of 27% and 17.6% of the participants gaining successful exit from the CSSA net, but how temporary or permanent the effect is, remained unanswered. Furthermore, it was concluded that the scheme had a low

cost-benefit – the operational cost was higher than the expenditure saved from the CSSA payment for the participants who could successfully exit the social safety net (Social Welfare Department, 2005).

Besides, the rise in caseloads for the unemployment and low income categories, the rising trend in single parents' group was also worrying, thus the Social Welfare Department particularly launched the Ending Exclusion Project (EEP) starting from March 2002, targeting at helping and encouraging CSSA single parents whose youngest child aged below 15 to enhance their social and economic participation in society in order to reduce their risk of social exclusion. This program was basically voluntary in nature with no sanctions imposed, and only those who have been on welfare dole for six months or above would be invited to participate. Supportive counseling services were rendered as the dominant intervention approach, while employment assistance was entirely voluntary (Legislative Council, 2001). And again an evaluation was conducted and results were released in December 2003 (Leung, Ip & Au, 2003). A longitudinal survey methodology with a control group design was employed. In comparison with the control group, EEP participants were found to exhibit more awareness of the need for social participation and more awareness of the need to establish self-reliance. Besides, they also exhibited more

job-seeking behaviour and greater success in engaging in more part-time employment and hence experienced less social isolation. Moreover, they were able to cope more rationally and their children had a more positive perception of parent-child relationship. Despite these positive effects, the EEP group obtained less support from significant others in job-seeking. And as the program proceeds, the participants generally displayed positive effects in work involvement, psychological well-being and child caring.

To still further intensify and strengthen the self-reliance ideology, HK\$200 million was obtained from the Lotteries Fund and the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust to launch the Intensive Employment Assistance Project (IEAP) in 2003. There are indeed three batches to be launched at different periods. In the first batch of the project, 40 non-governmental organizations (see Appendix 1) were commissioned to run employment assistance projects in a three-year period, from October 2003 to September 2006. The main objective of these projects is to encourage and assist members of the vulnerable groups, especially employable CSSA recipients, to return to the workforce or move up the job ladder to achieve self-sufficiency. It aims at not only helping the able-bodied unemployed CSSA recipients back to work but has also extended the target recipients to the near CSSA

recipients so to prevent them from falling into the CSSA net. The CSSA recipients are thus mandatory participants, who have been enrolled in the AEA program within three months and then referred to join the IEAP, whereas the near CSSA recipients could be classified as voluntary participants.

The organizations were granted freedom to design their own projects, which could range from individualized employment counseling to setting up small-scale business. Incentive payments could be offered to project participants, but the amount should not exceed HK\$1,000 per month, and six months is the maximum period in receiving such incentive. In addition, the 40 operating agencies are entitled to administer the Temporary Financial Aid (TFA), which amounts to HK\$200,000 annually, to provide timely financial assistance to meet the needs of the unemployed or low-income families who are not on CSSA, with the main purpose to facilitate their return to the workforce and attain self-sufficiency. In this tripartite venture, the private sector is the funding source; the third sector is responsible for the design and implementation of the innovative programs, while the government administers the distribution of the funding and monitors the performance of the various programs operated by the NGOs. The performance indicators set by the SWD could also reflect the government's chief and ultimate concern – to move the CSSA recipients out of

the safety net (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1

Performance Indicators of the IEAP and their Achievements as at April 2004

Output Indicator	Output Level		No. of projects that achieved the pre-determined target for CSSA recipients as at April 2004
	CSSA participants	Near CSSA participants	
Number of participants	70	30	19
Participants to complete the range of activities organized by the agency or take up employment	90% of total participants		1
Service participants to take up a full-time paid job ¹	40%	40%	2
CSSA participants to change to either CSSA low-earner or non-CSSA recipient status after securing full-time employment	30%	-	13
Participants to be supported so that they can stay in the job for at least three months after securing full-time employment	30%	30%	4

Note. ¹ Full-time employment is defined as receiving monthly pay of not less than HK\$1,430 and with working hours of not less than 120 per month. From Social Welfare Department, HKSAR (2003). *Important Notes to Applicant Organizations*. Retrieved, July 6, 2004, from <http://www.info.gov.hk/swd/download/whatsnew/200406/ieap3.doc>; Social Welfare Department, HKSAR. (2004, June 2). Power point presented at Sharing Session on the Progress of Intensive Employment Assistance Projects.

Other than the above-mentioned performance indicators, the SWD has also commissioned The Chinese University of Hong Kong to evaluate the effectiveness of the projects. Both qualitative and quantitative data were obtained in the study, however, the survey remained to be the dominant data collection method and much greater attention was granted to the analysis of quantitative data. The findings were generally supportive of the IEAP, confirming its effectiveness in promoting self-reliance. It was found that the Batch 1 IEAP participants and ex-participants when compared to their non-participating counterparts reported higher motivation to work, were less inclined to depend on CSSA in the future, and were more successful in building up both human and social capital. Moreover, the social work practitioners from both the SWD and the NGOs agreed that the IEAP was more helpful than the AEA, CW and the DE. And successful program factors identified included the TFA, employment counseling, counseling and training not directly related to employment and post-employment services (Tang, 2006; Tang et al., 2005). Other than this study done by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, no other research was conducted to evaluate the IEAP thus far.

In the following table, detailed description and characteristics of the various state-led welfare-to-work initiatives mentioned above were compiled and compared.

Table 5.2

State-led Program Initiatives in promoting self-reliance since 1999

Year	Program	Description	Characteristics
1999	Active Employment Assistance (AEA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Personalized employment assistance ● Up-to-date labour market information through Online Active Employment Information Services ● Matched with job vacancies ● Post-placement services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● First attempt to move CSSA recipients towards self-reliance ● Mandatory ● 'Work-first' orientation ● Services rendered by SWD staff
	Community Work (CW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Applicants were required to perform community work up to a maximum of three days or 24 hours a week ● Aimed at developing work habit ● Paved way for eventual employment ● Contribute to society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mandatory ● Underlying ideology: culture of poverty ● Punitive in nature
	Disregarded Earnings (DE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Total disregard of first month's income earned from new job ● Partial disregard of monthly income ● If the wages earned from employment is below the amount of CSSA, CSSA would be supplemented to the prescribed level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Positive Incentive

Table 5.2 (Continued)

Year	Program	Description	Characteristics
2001	Special Job Attachment Program (SJA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Two-year projects launched by 13 NGOs each in different districts ● Provide job placement opportunities for 3 to 6 months either in their own set-up or other non-profit making organizations ● Monthly allowance of \$1,805 was provided ● No less than six-months post placement service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Targeted mainly at able-bodied unemployed single-parent CSSA recipients ● 'Work-first' orientation
	Intensive Employment Assistance Fund (IEAF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● \$43 million fund secured from the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council ● 19 NGOs launched a total of 23 projects lasting from within one year to three years ● Tailor-made and more intensive employment assistance (e.g. training on job search skills were provided) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More individualized ● Tailor-made
2002	Ending Exclusion Project (EEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Employment Assistance ● Complementary services, including referral to single-parent centers, child day care centers etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Targeted exclusively for single-parent CSSA recipients, whose youngest child is under the age of 15 ● Voluntary

Table 5.2 (Continued)

Year	Program	Description	Characteristics
2003	Intensive Employment Assistance Project (IEAP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Target participants included both unemployed CSSA recipients and near CSSA recipients ● \$200 million fund granted by Jockey Club Charities Trust and Lotteries Fund ● NGOs were granted freedom to implement projects which they found desirable. ● Programs ranged from individualized services to setting up new businesses ● Minimum Performance Standards set by the SWD ● Temporary Financial Aid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Included both mandatory and voluntary participants ● Tripartite partnership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Private sector (Jockey Club) – funding source; b) Government – role of management and monitoring; c) Third sector – design and implementation of program ● First Joint Innovative Effort

Note. The DE is only applicable to recipients who have been on CSSA not less than three months.

5.3 Focus of the Present Study

This research focuses in studying the IEAP amongst the various welfare-to-work initiatives, for it is the latest innovative and tripartite effort between 1) the government which adopted a minimal role of management and monitoring; 2) the private sector (Hong Kong Jockey Club) which is the funding source; and 3) the

third sector in the social welfare arena. Thus NGOs were granted much more freedom to design and implement programs that may involve a variety of approaches with different orientations and emphases. Moreover, the target participants have been extended from exclusively mandatory in nature to inclusion of voluntary participants (Social Welfare Department, 2003).

And as discussed in the first chapter, those previous studies were conducted and commissioned by the SWD and were highly administrative-led, mostly revealing the gross short-term success rate in employment. And the dominant quantitative approach in those studies could only provide and reinforce the etic views of outsiders. In view of the above considerations and noted research gaps, this study aims at unveiling the black box into why, how and who actually succeed or otherwise in the workfare program by obtaining emic perspectives from the stakeholders of the IEAP.

CHAPTER SIX

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Overview of the Research Design

A single case study with embedded case studies was adopted as the research design in the present research. ‘A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’ (Yin, 2003, p. 13). Moreover, the case study approach possesses a distinct advantage – ‘when a “how” or “why” question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control’ (Yin, 2003, p. 9). All these characteristics itself clearly explain why a case study design is appropriate for the investigation of the current research.

The one single case chosen as the subject of the current study was regarded as an epitome amongst the 40 NGOs operating the first batch IEAP. Its success was credited by meeting all the performance indicators stipulated by the SWD (see Table

5.1). This project itself is one unit of analysis, while another unit of analysis refers to the individuals participating in the project. Such an embedded case study was preferred to the holistic design, which merely focused on the global nature of the one unit analyzed. The subunits, in this case, individual participants, were selected through stratified purposeful sampling, which would be discussed in the following sections.

This design is supported by the naturalistic form of qualitative inquiry and data collection was mainly performed in form of face-to-face in-depth interviews, capturing the emic perspectives of the stakeholders, namely the participants and the social work professionals.

Detailed description and justification of the research design, for instance, its philosophical orientation, sampling strategies, data collection method and data analysis, are illustrated below.

6.2 Philosophical Orientation and Justifications

The methodology of this research is basically designed with the conception of the naturalistic paradigm. When a certain methodology is chosen, it is not simply a choice of method, but a concern for the logic of justification in understanding the exercise of the method. The researcher has to ask for what principles by which the inquiry problem has been formulated; how answers would be developed to the respective problems; and to evaluate how true or trustworthy are those findings (Guba, 1990). In other words, the chosen methodology should reflect the researcher's ontological and epistemological orientation.

The naturalistic paradigm adopted in this study entails an explicit distaste and rejection of the positivistic paradigm, which has long been criticized as the 'naïve realism'. Naturalists object the positivists' 1) ontological assumption of a single reality 'out there' to be discovered; 2) their epistemological assumption about the discrete dualism and separateness of the inquirer and the object under study; 3) their aim in developing a nomothetic body of knowledge and truth for all contexts of time and space; 4) their assumptions of mere linear causality; and last but not least 5) their naïveté that the method and results of inquiry could be value free (Lincoln & Guba,

1985).

In stark contrast, the naturalists are guided by totally reversed axioms. They believe that 1) realities are in fact multiple and constructed; 2) the inquirer and the object investigated are in reality, mutually influential and inseparable; 3) only time- and context-bound hypotheses are possible; 4) all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping that it is virtually impossible to distinguish causes from effects; and 5) inquiry is indeed value-bound, as observed in the choice of the problem studied, the choice of paradigm and the choice of theory utilized in interpretations etc.

The qualitative method of inquiry which aims at obtaining subjective, first-person information and experience rather than an objective truth from an etic perspective, fits well with the ontological and epistemological views and assumptions of the naturalistic paradigm. Moreover, since workfare initiatives in the Hong Kong context are relatively new and its desirability and feasibility (especially the why and how question) from a native viewpoint have not been thoroughly explored, the qualitative approach with a strong exploratory nature, which captures rich and thick descriptions from the emic perspectives of respondents, is thus an

appropriate and logical choice of method. And indeed Mead (2005) has criticized researches merely focusing on statistical robustness, providing descriptive inferences between variables, but suggesting no explicit connection between actual implementation of policy and program outcomes or impacts and hence provided few levers for policy. He urged academics to conduct more realistic field studies obtaining first-hand accounts that provide more relevance for policy implementation instead of statistically robust descriptive studies with little influence.

6.3 Sampling

As described above, there are two units of analyses in the study. The first unit, which is the agency, was chosen due to its extraordinary success in the implementation of the program as measured by the performance indicators stipulated by the SWD. The agency chosen was the only one which could meet all the requirements as at April 2004 (see Table 5.1).

For the second unit of analysis i.e., the individual participants in the program, a small number but in-depth samples were studied for qualitative samples tend to be purposive instead of random, as preferred in quantitative research (Kuzel, 1992;

Morse, 1989). This is because with small number of cases examined, random sampling could yield biased results (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Moreover, this is an exploratory research, thus obtaining information-rich cases for in-depth study is a predominant concern, which clearly supersedes the need to obtain a confident generalization from the sample to a larger population. I have thus chosen stratified purposeful sampling (Kuzel, 1992; Patton, 1990) in conducting this research, so to facilitate comparison and to aim at obtaining a more holistic, comprehensive and least biased picture. This also enabled the triangulation of data source for the purpose of convergent validation (Campbell & Fiske, 1959), since qualitative data would be collected not only from the IEAP participants, but also from the social work practitioners responsible for designing or / and implementing the programs. This multiple data source or stakeholder involvement attempts to minimize the threats to validity and to obtain a more holistic picture of the question studied.

The first level of stratification is classified according to the roles in a helping relationship; in this case the social work practitioners and the IEAP participants. In the second level of stratification, the program participants were originally intended to be classified as mandatory participants who were the able-bodied unemployed CSSA recipients and the voluntary participants (near CSSA recipients). However, in the

process of data collection, the social work practitioners found that it was actually difficult to locate voluntary participants as the near CSSA recipients were actually eligible in applying for CSSA, therefore once they were located by the social workers, they were recommended to apply for CSSA to solve their unmet needs, and hence shortly fell into the CSSA net. In view of this, the participants were then classified according to their length of spell in CSSA, and they were divided into two categories: short-term (six months or less) and long-term (more than six months) recipients. The six months' dividing line was indeed suggested by the social work practitioner interviewed whose experience told her that such duration seemed to serve as a critical classification of the characteristics and outcome of the IEAP participants. In the final level of stratification, both short termers and long termers were categorized according to the outcome concerned (i.e., their CSSA status after joining the program), namely those who remained unemployed; those who were shifted to the low-income category; and those who successfully exited the CSSA net for at least three months (this category also included those who fell back to the CSSA net again after three months or more). All the participants involved in this study were referred by the agency (see Table 6.1 below).

Table 6.1

Classification and number of respondents for stratified purposeful sampling

Social Work Practitioners		
	2	
CSSA Status after joining the program	IEAP Participants	
	Short-term CSSA	Long-term CSSA
	recipients	recipients
Remain unemployed	-	3
Shift from unemployed to low earners	N.A.	1
Exit from CSSA net	3	1

Note. If the short-term CSSA recipients remained unemployed, they would automatically fall into the long-term category, so such category did not exist.

6.4 Data Collection Method

As specified above, face-to-face interviews were conducted as the dominant data collection method. This method was chosen to grasp an inner perspective, for instance, interpretations, feelings and thoughts, which could not be otherwise obtained by mere direct observation of behaviours (Patton, 1987). Amongst the various interview instrumentations, the general interview guide approach was chosen,

in which the general outline of the issues concerned was decided in advance (see Appendix 2). This serves as a basic checklist to ensure that no important and pertinent information would be omitted, and to ensure the same list of information would be obtained in order to facilitate comparison. However, the sequence, wording and level of elaboration were prompted by the actual interview process. The interviewer was also sensitive and alert to any unanticipated emerging themes and responses. Moreover, in the actual conducting of the interview, the interviewer was able to demonstrate sensitivity, support, recognition and neutrality as well as to establish rapport with the interviewees. Other than verbal data, the interviewer also paid attention to the non-verbal communication, which might also serve as an additional source of information.

As shown in Table 6.1, two social work professionals and eight IEAP participants were interviewed. These interviews were conducted from May to July 2005. Most respondents were interviewed once, some twice when further information was necessary. The interviews were conducted either in fast food shops, restaurants or in a private room provided by the NGO concerned. The average duration of each interview was approximately two hours. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed, since mere reliability on memory is certainly

inadequate and inaccurate.

6.5 Data Analysis

As Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested, data analysis have started from the very beginning, interweaving with the process of data collection. This allowed greater possibility of collecting new data to fill in gaps, to test hypotheses that emerged during analysis and encouraged the formulation of rival hypotheses. In this research, I have adopted the data analysis methods and tools as discussed by Miles and Huberman (1994). This is because they have provided the most detailed and explicit discussion; as well as a vastly greater number of techniques for the analysis issues when compared with that of Patton (1990); Guba and Lincoln (1981); and Eisner (1991). And the most important of all is that I agree with their major concern that there is a possibility that the researcher would be wrong in making erroneous assumptions, premature closure, self-delusion, judgmental error etc. Thus it is especially crucial and essential for the researcher to make the ways in which researcher draw and test conclusions explicit (Pitman & Maxwell, 1992). The following were the data analysis tools that I have used:

1) Case Summary and Analysis Sheet

This was a sheet filled up as soon as the transcription of a single interview has been completed. It included information like: the general impression of the interviewee (this might include the non-verbal expressions and observations), some factual information about the interviewee (such as demographic characteristics, length of spell in CSSA etc.); main themes and impressions (this data would be primarily phrases and sentences that the researcher thought to be answers to questions as outlined in the interview guide, in addition reflective remarks were also added); and finally, hypotheses and alternative explanations (see Appendix 3 for example). This served as a guide for planning subsequent interviews if new themes emerged; it also helped to establish and revise codes; and served as an aid for further data analysis. Two peers (both of them were MPhil students; one from the Department of Social Work and another from the Department of Public and Social Administration) were also invited to read every transcription and comment on the respective case summary and analysis sheets in order to enhance reflexivity and to guard against potential biases.

2) Codes and Coding

Coding is a very important step in the analysis process, aiming at differentiating and combining the data obtained and the reflections made about this information. Codes are thus labels assigning meanings to the descriptive and inferential data.

Since this is predominantly an exploratory study, the inductive coding technique is employed, i.e., no pre-coding or pre-structures were established in advance. This technique requires and allows the researcher to be more open-minded and context-sensitive. Moreover, throughout the process, codes were revised, dropped, merged and developed as field experience accumulated. This development of the code system was made easier by the help of the computer software, Nudist NVivo.

The coding process could be classified into stages, because there are different levels of codes. Firstly, there are the descriptive ones, which merely attributed a class of phenomena to a segment of text, with little interpretation (for instance, codes like acceptance, empathy, concern etc.); next there came the interpretive codes, which involves the reflective interpretation of the researcher (for instance, the above-mentioned descriptive codes are all coded under 'characteristics of

intervention', an interpretive code); last but not least are the pattern codes. They are the highest level codes because they are explanatory or inferential in nature, aiming at identifying themes or configurations and establishing causal links (for instance, all the above-mentioned descriptive codes are coded under 'being-first orientation', a pattern code). Having completed the first-level coding, which provided me with 1183 segments of data coded into 213 descriptive codes (or nodes in Nudist NVivo), I then proceeded with pattern coding, a device to group those summaries into smaller number of themes, constructs, relationships or causal explanations. This is an extremely important step, for it helps the researcher to develop a schematic framework for systematic understanding and analysis. This also laid the groundwork for cross-case comparisons and rival explanations.

To enhance the credibility of the data, it is essential to perform inter-rater as well as intra-rater reliability (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Both reliabilities are measured as the number of agreements over the sum of the total number of agreements and disagreements. Intra-rater reliability refers to the code-checking performed by the same coder but at different times, for instance an interval of a few days or weeks; while inter-rater reliability is achieved by inviting another person (in this case, a graduate from Master of Social Work) other than the researcher to assess whether he

agrees with the codes. The researcher has randomly chosen 30 segments of data from three interpretive codes: 'barriers to employment', 'factors facilitating successful employment', and 'characteristics of intervention' to perform inter and intra-rater reliability checking. The intra-rater reliability was found to be 93.3%; while the inter-rater reliability was 83.3%.

3) *Memos*

Memo taking is still another tool for analysis. It is by Glaser's (1978, p. 83) definition, 'the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding'. It is a self-reflexive device that captures the researcher's momentary and spontaneous thoughts or ideas based on the data, and could often provide exciting, sunlit insights and clarity. Throughout the whole coding process, I have produced 13 memos, which constitute the main insights in the findings.

4) *Vignettes*

Vignettes are the narrative exemplars that describe the most representative and meaningful data. Erikson (1986) acknowledged that vignettes could be powerful tools in helping the researcher to illustrate and clarify the perspectives, in which first-hand, real-life narrative abstractions were presented. However, he also reminded us that the illustration of one single vignette might be potentially dangerous and misleading and lack interpretive validity. Multiple vignettes would help minimize this risk. These could be found in the subsequent chapters relating to findings.

5) *Within-Case Displays*

Displays refer to visual formats that organize information obtained systematically, so that the researcher could have a general overview of the case in order to draw valid conclusions. Displays could take form as charts, diagrams, matrices, graphs etc. depending on the structure of information retrieved. This is needed because full transcriptions are often long, extended and unreduced text, which are weak and cumbersome forms of display. This makes analysis and comparison of cases extremely difficult. Simplified forms of displays thus solve the

problem. Within-case displays are thus produced in form of tables compiling the individual participants' family career, housing career and employment career, showing the interrelationship of these different arenas within his or her life course (see Appendix 4 for example).

6) *Cross-Case Displays*

Cross-case analysis is conducted to enhance generalizability and to deepen understanding and explanation, since multiple cases could help researchers to find negative cases to strengthen a theory through examining similarities and differences across cases. These displays, similar to the within-case displays, could exist in a variety of forms, but they are generally established by three strategies, namely, case-oriented strategy, variable-oriented strategy, or a combination of case-oriented and variable-oriented strategies. The mixed strategy is generally more preferable as it 'allows analysis of parts in a way that does not obscure wholes ... and compare wholes as configurations of parts' (Ragin, 1987). For example, please see Table 7.1.

6.6 Ethical Concerns

Since this is a qualitative research, and interviews were conducted in a face-to-face manner, subjects are definitely known to the researcher, anonymity is therefore virtually nonexistent (Berg, 2004). Thus the issue of confidentiality is especially important to protect the rights of the subjects and to maximize the credibility of the data provided by the interviewees. The researcher has explained the issues of confidentiality and has assured interviewees (both social work practitioners and the IEAP participants) that the information obtained in their interviews would be kept in strict confidence, i.e., no one else besides the researcher and the interviewee could locate the source of the data. It is necessary to explain to the subjects that their identity and their respective agencies would not be disclosed in any research output. This is realized by substituting their real names by pseudonyms or case numbers in reporting the findings.

The researcher also noted that the description of certain characteristics of individuals or the programs concerned may be specific, which may make it possible to discover the subjects' identity (Gibbons, 1975). With this in mind, the researcher has been alert with this ethical concern and was particularly cautious in presenting

and discussing the subjects and their respective settings (Hagan, 1993; Hessler, 1992).

6.7 Research Rigour

Qualitative studies, as in quantitative studies, do concern the issue of research rigour. However, in naturalistic paradigm, the understanding of the conventional terms: internal validity, external validity, internal reliability and external reliability, is slightly different from that of the positivist paradigm. When we are talking about research rigour in qualitative studies, we are actually referring to their 'trustworthiness' as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). 'The basic issue in relation to trustworthiness is simple: How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?' (p. 290) Thus when designing and actually conducting the research, the researcher has in mind the following criteria of soundness as posed by Lincoln and Guba (1985):

- 1) Truth value/ credibility: to establish confidence in the truth of the findings for the subjects with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out.
- 2) Applicability/ transferability: to determine the extent to which the findings

have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects in the same context.

- 3) Consistency/ dependability: to determine whether the findings would be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects in the same (or similar) context.
- 4) Neutrality/ confirmability: to establish the degree to which the findings are determined by the subjects and conditions of the inquiry and not by the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the inquirer.

To ensure the above criteria of soundness to be met or maximized, the researcher has built in the following measures as suggested by Marshall (1990) and Marshall and Rossman (1995) when designing, conducting and reporting the research:

- 1) The method of data collection, sampling and analysis had been explicated in detail so that the reader could judge whether it was adequate and made sense.

An audit trail has been developed to make the data collection and analysis procedures public and open.

- 2) Assumptions have been stated, and biases expressed in the literature review.
- 3) The research has been guarded against value judgments in the process of analysis by peer review and the performance of inter-rater reliability.

- 4) Abundance evidence has been drawn from the raw data to demonstrate the findings.
- 5) The researcher has been alert in the tolerance of ambiguity, has searched for alternative explanations, has checked out negative instances and has utilized triangulation e.g. use of multiple data sources (from both social workers and participants).
- 6) Data have been preserved and available for reanalysis.

6.8 Reflections

Prior the data collection and analysis process, I actually did not have any definite hypotheses or anticipations since I have always regarded this as an exploratory research. Every time I went for an interview, I was simply looking forward to new, unexplored insights. As the data collection progressed, interweaving with the data analysis process, some ideas struck me and I have recorded them as memos as aforementioned, which later after refinement and integration, became significant findings of the study. They are predominantly the being-first orientation and the family perspective in the implementation strategies of the workfare program (would be discussed in much greater detail in the following two chapters).

Though I have been consciously reminding myself to be open-minded and had actually made an effort doing so by proposing counter explanations alongside with the speculations made during the data collection/analysis process, as naturalists, I believe that researchers would not be totally value free.

I have to admit that the insight of the being-first orientation might be drawn or at least influenced by the deeply ingrained belief in the person-centered approach which I would regard as a very important value tenet in the social work education I have underwent.

As for the family perspective, it might be an unconscious and profoundly embedded cultural disposition which was shared by both the researcher and the participants in the study. Moreover, I believe that my Christian socialization has also contributed to this insight.

6.9 Limitations of the Study

The following limitations were spotted in this study:

Firstly, there is a possible bias in the respondents. All the IEAP participants participating in this study were referred by the agency concerned. A possible bias might result from the fact that the participants who have generally demonstrated a more positive attitude towards the program and have better relationship with the worker have a greater chance of participation in the study.

Secondly, there is the problem of breadth versus depth trade-off. High quality qualitative research could be very time-consuming, and with the limited timeframe, it is hardly inevitable to escape from the problem of depth-breadth trade-off. A balance should be struck between obtaining in-depth and rich information of single cases, and the breadth of retrieving data from more respondents from different subgroups in order to facilitate cross-case comparisons to enrich the picture formulated.

Finally, as for every qualitative study, generalizability is always a problem and is seen as a weakness by traditional canons. However, as suggested earlier,

qualitative studies in the naturalistic paradigm does not aim at generalizing findings to all context of time and space. To counter this challenge, the researcher has stated clearly the theoretical parameters so that the readers and policy makers could decide whether the cases described could be transferred to other settings.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This chapter as explained in its title aims at answering the research question – the desirability and feasibility of the new workfare initiative, the IEAP – by compiling and analyzing the qualitative data obtained. Answers to the research questions would be presented and analyzed according to the following framework: 1) Users' overall impression on the Program (including both the participants and the practitioners); 2) Factors attributing to successful employment; 3) Program factors facilitating successful employment; 4) Factors inhibiting successful employment; and 5) Barriers in achieving total self-reliance. Before presenting the results, the attributes of the respondents and the program components of the specific IEAP studied would first be described for readers to gain a background understanding and necessary information on how far the results could be generalized.

7.1 Profile of the Interviewees

A total of ten interviewees participated in the study, in which two are social work practitioners and the other eight are participants who have joined the IEAP Program. In the following table (Table 7.1), I will describe the demographic attributes of the eight participants. Nearly all participants I interviewed were male. Their average age is above 40. Four of them were married, two single and the other two divorced. Those who were once married had at least one child. Half of the participants had primary or below educational attainment, two finished secondary education, while another two received post secondary education. Only two of them were new immigrants from Mainland China, but the shortest duration of residence in Hong Kong has reached six years. After participating in the IEAP, four of them successfully exit the CSSA net, another one has changed from unemployment to low-income status, while the remaining three continued to be unemployed.

Table7.1

Profile of the Respondents: Eight Participants

Attributes	Participants							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Sex	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female
Age	47	51	30s	50s	36	27	41	50
Marital status	Married	Divorced	Single	Divorced	Married	Married	Single	Married
Number of Children	Two	One	Nil	Two	One	One	Nil	Three
Present Living Arrangement	Home for street sleepers	Home for street sleepers	Private rental	Private rental	Private rental	Public rental	Home for street sleepers	Public rental
Educational Attainment	Primary	University or above	Secondary	Below Primary	Secondary	Post-Secondary	Below Primary	Primary

Table 7.1 (continued)

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
New Immigrant?	×	×	×	×	✓	×	×	✓
(Years of Residence in Hong Kong)					(6 years)			(7 years)
Previous Occupation/Expertise	Metal Industry	Government Official	Involved in Illegal Business	Waiter	Cook (specialized in Dim Sum)	Repair Air-conditioner	Delivery	Housewife
Duration in CSSA net¹	Short Term (3 months)	Short Term (1 month)	Short Term (6 months)	Long Term (4 years)	Long Term (3 years intermittently)	Long Term (4 years)	Long Term (7 months)	Long Term (7 years)
CSSA status when entering IEAP	Unemployed	Near CSSA	Unemployed	Unemployed	Unemployed	Unemployed	Unemployed	Low-income
CSSA status after joining the IEAP	Exit and re-enter CSSA net within a year and exit again	Exit CSSA net	Exit CSSA net	Continued to be unemployed	Low-Income	Continued to be unemployed	Continued to be unemployed	Exit CSSA net

Note. ¹Short term refers to six months or less; whereas long term refers to more than six months. This classification was suggested by the social work practitioners interviewed.

7.2 Characteristics of the IEAP Studied

As described in previous chapters, the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were allowed freedom to design their own program content that suits the special needs of their targeted participants; thus it is essential to analyze the particular program design and the clientele of the chosen NGO in this study prior to the analysis and discussion of the findings.

Since the NGO chosen in this study is located in a relatively poor urban district, their target groups and hence the participants in the IEAP were mainly street-sleepers, ex-offenders, new immigrants and ethnic minority, in which street-sleepers constituted the majority of their clients. 90% of the participants were male and around 10% female who were mostly new immigrants from the Mainland China. The majority of their participants aged between forty and fifty, and most achieved primary education as their highest level of educational attainment. Such profile is similar to the profile of the interviewees participated in this study (see Table 7.1).

By design, a wide variety of services were provided to the IEAP participants, which ranged from intensive case management, group trainings (e.g. on financial

planning), case referrals (e.g. those with serious uncontrollable gambling behaviours), job-matching and the establishment of a cooperative / small-scale business. This Cooperative was one of the program components in assisting participants to gainful employment. The agency acted as a coordinator, it recruited suitable IEAP participants and referred jobs to them such as providing renovation service to the elderly living in the community. This provides the participants the opportunity to accumulate their working experience and improve their skills and the elderly could have their house repaired with an affordable price. Though small amount of money would be rewarded for their hard work, they were not encouraged to treat this as a long-term job, for the maximum period in which one participant could stay in the Cooperative was six months. The Cooperative indeed acted as a bridge for the participants to transit from unemployment to successful employment in the open market.

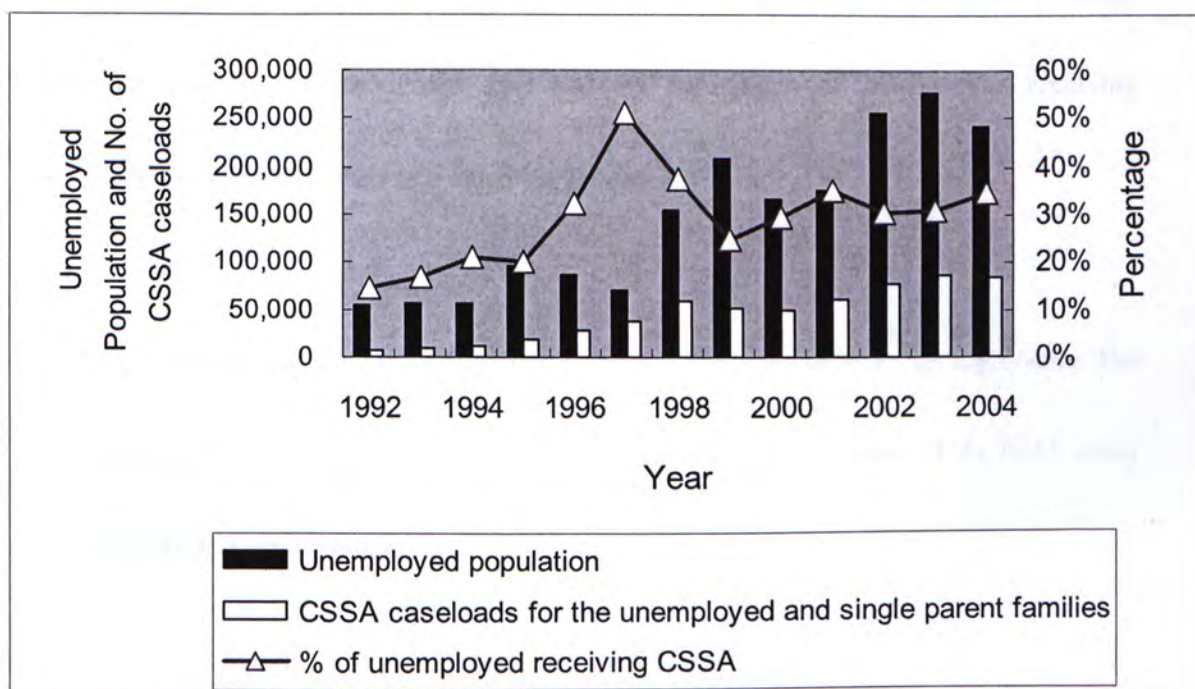
7.3 Major Findings

Many studies (Rodgers, 2005; Murray & Primus, 2005; Bryner & Martin, 2005; Blank, 2000; Taylor-Gooby, Larsen & Kananen, 2004) tried to evaluate the success of workfare programs by analyzing its impacts on gross economic and social

statistics such as the unemployment rates, poverty rates and percentage of poor receiving cash assistance etc. These figures undeniably provide us with some clues on the general picture, however, it would be difficult and premature in drawing the conclusion that changes in these gross statistics were a result of the implementation of workfare programs. Even though they suggested some relationship between them, we still have little knowledge on why and how such effect came about.

Figure 7.1

Percentage of Unemployed Population Receiving CSSA in Hong Kong



Note. From 1) Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR. (2006). *Labour Force, Unemployment and Unemployment* [Data file]. Available from Census and Statistics Department Web site, http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hong_kong_statistics/statistical_tables/index.jsp; 2) Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR. (Various years). *Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.

For instance, in Figure 7.1, it illustrates the unemployed population, the CSSA caseloads and the percentage of unemployed receiving CSSA in Hong Kong. Discounting the sudden disruption of the impact of the AFC in 1997, we could generally observe a rising trend in the percentage of unemployed receiving CSSA. In terms of the government's financial imperative to cut welfare expenditures, workfare initiatives since 1998 seem not quite successful. However, one could argue that since the population of the working poor has been increasing (Wong, 2005) and they have become more prone to poverty that CSSA have become their only resort when the fate of unemployment fell upon them. And therefore, with the absence of workfare programs, the unemployment rate and the percentage of unemployed receiving CSSA would have risen to a much bigger extent.

As such, we need more information and evidence to support our arguments. The Social Welfare Department had indeed evaluated the effectiveness of the IEAP using a set of performance indicators as shown in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2

**The Overall IEAP Performance as at April 2004
(Seven months after the implementation of the Project)**

Performance Indicators	CSSA Participants	Near CSSA Participants
Total No. of Participants	3 483	1 049
No. of Participants secured full-time employment	888 (19.6%)	423 (40.3%)
No. of Participants left the CSSA net	168 (4.8%)	-
No. of Participants changed to 'low earnings' category	296 (8.5%)	-

Note. From Social Welfare Department, HKSAR. (2004, June 2). Power point presented at Sharing Session on the Progress of Intensive Employment Assistance Projects.

Nevertheless, the above statistics still gave us no clue on why and how the program was successful or otherwise. This present study thus aims at grasping the first-hand and much richer information from the participants as well as the professional social workers in order to unveil the black box which helps us to understand why, how and to whom the workfare approach is desirable or otherwise. In the following, I would try to synthesize the views from the participants as well as the practitioners so to gain insights to the desirability and feasibility of the IEAP.

7.3.1 Users' Overall Impression on the IEAP

7.3.1.1 Participants' Views

7.3.1.1.1 Positive Views

The participants generally found the IEAP desirable as 27 segments of data were coded as positive views and attitudes towards the project versus 10 segments of data coded as negative views and attitudes towards the project. Moreover, nearly all participants including both successful cases and unsuccessful ones strongly agreed that this IEAP Program was preferable to the Active Employment Assistance (AEA) provided by the Social Welfare Department in the SFS Scheme. Prior to the participation in the IEAP, most participants have been assigned to join the AEA, and they found that real active, intensive and practical assistance were only provided by staff from the NGO implementing the IEAP, whereas they viewed the AEA as a mere administrative procedure with no sincerity in assisting them towards employment. One participant described the difference between the service received from IEAP and AEA as follows:

[The AEA required me to meet the officer] twice a month, and each time I was required to prove [to the officer] that I had two

job interviews. Actually, that is no difficult task for normally I have more than two job interviews every week. [The AEA officers] would not help you in the job search process; I think it's totally useless. If I were lazy and was not willing to work, I would have preferred to join the AEA. However, the staff of the IEAP would provide intensive and practical help. They would actually assist you in job matching and arrange an interview appointment for you. It's indeed difficult for you to reject. In contrast, the SWD officers would not care about you, you were just required to report to them and that's it.

Another participant, though had not yet successfully escaped from the CSSA net shared similar feelings and complained the attitude of the AEA staff as indifferent and uncaring, which stood in stark contrast with the professional social workers they encountered in the IEAP:

[I felt] there is a change [after participating in the IEAP], at least somebody cared about you. When you went to the Social Welfare Department, no one would care about you.....but it is different here (i.e., IEAP). [The social workers] will talk with you, showing care and concern, and you won't feel any pressure. [The Social Welfare Department] wasn't giving you pressure either, they just didn't care. Just don't bother them.

Such big contrast might help to account for the welcoming attitude of participants towards the IEAP. One participant even described himself as fortunate being able to participate in the IEAP. Moreover, participants also showed appreciation in the practical assistance offered such as job referrals and the Temporary Financial Aid (TFA):

They will call the employers to see if they have job vacancies and will refer jobs to us..... I think what they did is perfect. Even though the job was not suitable for me, I felt they had tried their best. I think they really did a good job.

(Participant A)

7.3.1.1.2 Negative Views

However, practitioners also reported resistant and non-cooperative attitude of some participants initially joining the IEAP (3 segments of data from practitioners and 1 segment of data from the participants). The practitioners thought this might also be attributed to their prior distasteful experiences in the SFS Scheme which led them to interpret the IEAP as another government's effort to humiliate them. And for those who could not yet successfully exit the CSSA net, even after participating in the IEAP would tend to think that the

IEAP was not useful. For instance, one participant responded angrily:

I have attended two group sharing sessions. They are talking nonsense. The social worker invited successful IEAP participants who have once received CSSA but now secured long-term jobs to teach us how to find jobs and how to behave and get along with others in society. What advantage does that do to me? Nothing! It's useless! It's only useful when I could find a job!

7.3.1.2 Practitioners' Views

7.3.1.2.1 Strengths of the IEAP

For the practitioners, they basically welcomed the idea of the IEAP. The two practitioners I interviewed especially appreciated the freedom granted to agencies in the actual design and implementation of the Program, because they believed that there were no one perfect formula for all unemployed CSSA recipients and the autonomy granted could allow new innovations to solve the problem of unemployment:

Every project has their own uniqueness, because different agencies might have different strengths. The circumstances and

needs of each unemployed individual might differ from another. If the same way of intervention was applied to all, it would only lead to a dead end The problem of unemployment could not be solved using mechanisms of mass production in factories, instead new ideas and innovations should be generated..... We would allow participants freedom to choose whether they want to join the retraining programs first or whether they would like to seek jobs first.

7.3.1.2.2 *Weaknesses of the IEAP*

Despite the above desirable characteristics of the IEAP, the practitioners did spot several weaknesses, namely the inefficient and impractical monitoring of the Temporary Financial Aid (TFA) Fund and the non transparency in the recruitment of participants leading to mismatch between resources and service users. The TFA Fund served the purpose of emergency financial assistance for employment-related expenses, however, the social work practitioners in the agency had no authority in directly granting or loaning money; say just below HK\$20 (~US\$2.60), to their participants in need of such assistance. They have to request for endorsement from the SWD every single time. The practitioner described the irony as follows:

For instance, for participants who have job offers for security guard posts, they need to apply for a security card which costs HK\$150 (~US\$19.30), and if they didn't have the money, we'd loan it to them. If they have to work in construction sites, they need safety shoes, uniforms etc. But the irony is that the endorsement process is lengthy in terms of time. For instance, one participant came and told me happily on Thursday that he had a job offer and has to start working the next day i.e., Friday, and that he needed subsidies for transport and food etc. According to common sense, if you assessed that the situation is urgent, then the money requested should be offered immediately. However, according to the present system, [we have to notify the SWD and request for their endorsement]. For instance, when we e-mailed the request to the responsible staff in SWD on Friday, they will start to process the request on Monday and will reply us via e-mail on Wednesday informing us whether the application is successful or not. That means we could not grant the needy participant financial subsidies on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, a total of seven days.....

When the participants with urgent needs were facing such inefficient administrative process, the social work practitioners would, strictly speaking, loan the participants money in an 'illicit' manner:

We usually took the risk in loaning participants money prior to the approval of the SWD.... Actually we were already pretty stringent on the loans, for instance, when they need to work in Tsim Sha Tsui, and the transport cost is HK\$14 (~US\$1.80) daily, we would loan them money on a daily mode..... Usually, the loan is less than HK\$20 (~US\$2.60), but it took seven working days for approval.....The greatest sarcasm is that they have actually set aside quite a large sum of money for this TFA Fund as part of the IEAP, it's around HK\$200,000 (~US\$25,715). However, I knew that only a few agencies have actually used this service, and we are one of them, but we could only utilize it in an 'illicit' manner.

Another dissatisfaction was the non transparency in the recruitment of participants. In the present operation, the SWD possesses the authority in allocating the able-bodied unemployed individuals to either the IEAP or the Self-Reliance Scheme, while the NGOs have no right in selecting participants whom they thought should be suitable for their program. The social work practitioner argued that such arrangement would lead to a mismatch of resources:

Problem arises for some participants might not be suitable for our agency e.g., there were participants who did not even know how to write his own name, and if they did not join this program

voluntarily, they would have great resistance towards our service....

I think this program should be suitable for those who desire and has the ability to work.... There are only about 100 quota for each agency. I think they should have a preliminary assessment of the participants' ability before allocating them to join the IEAP to avoid wasting the resources.

Such non-transparency in the recruitment process instigated the social work practitioners to wonder whether there were individuals who were actually very suitable for the intensive mode of assistance in the IEAP but were not given the chance and they suspected that the SWD has deliberately withheld the more ready-to-work cases to participate in the Self-Reliance Scheme implemented by the SWD itself instead of the IEAP:

We have this suspicion, because there is the Community Work Scheme [in the SFS Scheme] in which unemployed individuals will come to our agency to do voluntary work. They usually come three times a week and we discovered that they have better dispositions and are more competent when compared with the IEAP participants whose educational attainments were lower and attitude poorer..... We are sure that some participants who are joining the Community Work Scheme desire to find a job, but we could not offer them our service, because they have to at least

participate in doing voluntary work for half a year before they could join the IEAP. The sarcasm lies in the fact that these unemployed individuals in fact very much desire to work however the Community Work Scheme actually hinders them from finding jobs.

(Social work practitioner 1)

7.3.2 Factors Attributing to Successful Employment

7.3.2.1 Fresh CSSA recipients

When we look at Table 7.1, the profile of the interviewees, we could find that participants A, B, C and H were the successful cases who were able to step out of the CSSA net towards gainful employment after participating in the IEAP for an average duration of about 6 months; and Participant E has managed to transit from the unemployed to the low-income category. Each one of them has their own unique story and background. They came from different walks of life, attained different levels of education, possessed different skills, were in different marital status and spanned across different age ranges. It is indeed not easy to locate common demographic characteristics from these successful individuals as the practitioner had said ‘all unemployed individuals have their unique circumstances and needs and there

is no one perfect formula for all of them'. However, one interesting finding is that in contrast to the unsuccessful cases, three out of four of the successful participants have actually received CSSA for a relatively short period of time, and the remaining one whose family has been receiving CSSA for a relatively long period was in the low-income category instead of the unemployed group. In contrast, the other long-term counterparts were not yet able to exit the CSSA net to achieve self-reliance. The one objective factor influencing the success of the participants seems to be the duration in which the participants were in the CSSA net.

7.3.2.2 Participants' differential views on Welfare Dole versus Work

When analyzing the participants' views on CSSA, it was found that their self-reported opinions suggested a relationship between the duration in CSSA net and their attributions and reactions towards receiving CSSA. This might give a clue to the explanation of the correlation between the duration in CSSA net and the chance of success in moving towards gainful employment. Those who have just been on welfare rolls for a relatively short period tend to express more hard feelings and shameful feelings in receiving CSSA, and they all preferred working to relying on welfare rolls. While for those with a long spell in CSSA, only 2 segments of data

found that they had hard feelings towards receiving welfare dole, but 11 segments of data showed that they found themselves justified in receiving CSSA (e.g. they regarded CSSA as inevitable, a safety net and a way out etc.). Participant E who has successfully changed his CSSA status from unemployment to low-income said that:

I felt so uncomfortable going to the Social Welfare Department, but still have to go there twice a month, If I happened to meet someone I knew, I would feel so uncomfortable..... I dare not tell my son [about the fact that our family was on welfare rolls].
I also feel uncomfortable myself, how could I tell him?

He also said that his father reproached and scolded him for relying on welfare when he was first on welfare rolls and he felt so upset that he still could not forget what his father said even though his father has now deceased.

On the contrary, those who have been receiving CSSA for a relatively long period of time and still remained unemployed after participating in the IEAP inclined to justify their reliance on CSSA as inevitable, uncontrollable and they actually admitted that CSSA would create dependency and inertia to work. For instance, participant F worried that once he found a full-time job; he could not continue to receive CSSA, which he thought would be a more stable source of income. On this

point, participant G admitted that:

When you are on CSSA, you will become lazy..... will have the feeling of being very lazy. I do feel myself getting lazier than eight months ago when I first received CSSA. In the beginning, you would try your best to struggle to survive, but as time went by and life became more stable, you would tend to become a bit lazier than before.

This finding was also echoed by the social work practitioner. She indeed interpreted some participants' reliance on welfare as a rational choice:

The CSSA recipients would tend to calculate and weigh the advantages in receiving CSSA versus work, especially the long-term recipients. They would become so calculative and would assess whether it's really worthwhile to give up receiving CSSA and go back to work. It required much courage and confidence to make such a breakthrough, which they often lack..... [However,] those who have only received CSSA for a short while have the biggest motivation to leave the CSSA net.

The view that welfare was regarded as a rational and preferred choice to work would be further illustrated in the section on factors inhibiting successful

employment. Nevertheless, it was not uncommon for participants, either the successful or the not-yet-successful participants, to show their preference for work over welfare yet differential views towards the function and value of work were identified. The long-term or unsuccessful participants were more likely to accord the meaning of work to its economic utility. For instance, Participant D found work a means to solve his financial needs and improve his quality of life:

CSSA is not enough. If I could find a job with an income of \$5000 (~US\$643), why shouldn't I work? The CSSA subsistence is not enough it could not meet my daily needs; balancing budgets became a nuisance for me every month.

And Participant F viewed work preferable when it could help him climb the social ladder:

Everyone preferred working and I believe they all hope to have a raise in income and be promoted in the career.... This is something CSSA can't do.

Whereas, those participants who had indeed successfully secured employment did not emphasize the financial rewards of work instead they had a propensity to accord work its socio-cultural utility. For instance, Participant B, though working in a

security company with a much lower social status than his previous job as a government official, found his current job interesting, because he could utilize his knowledge acquired previously in his current job, and hence gained job satisfaction. He said that he very much treasured the recognition from his boss and the whole company. As for Participant H, she admitted that work was strenuous but still cherished the opportunity to work as a means to social inclusion:

Although we need to pay much effort in work, it's good [to have the opportunity] to communicate with others and to learn [new things]..... I think it's worthwhile [to work]. If you stayed at home behind the walls, you wouldn't know what's happening around the world..... [If you work], you could get in touch with more people and could broaden your horizon. Even though [work] is strenuous, I believe it's worthwhile.

Moreover, she also viewed work preferable as it could serve as a good role model for her children. This would be further depicted in the coming sections.

The successful and unsuccessful participants' differential views on welfare dole versus work together with the triangulation of the subjective views of the social work practitioner were suggestive of the reasons behind the successful transition from

welfare to employment.

7.3.2.3 Adaptability of the Participants

Another factor common to all successful participants, contributing to their successful employment and hence eventual exit from the CSSA net was the adaptability of the participants (6 segments of data were coded). Some IEAP participants, before receiving CSSA, were not persistently trapped in low-income jobs, instead they might be having high social status or earning appreciable income, but have experienced drastic economic changes, mostly as a result of the transformation of economy or the economic turmoil in 1997. These participants often need extra courage and willpower to face such a catastrophic event in their lives. For instance, Participant A was once in a managerial position overseeing hundreds of workers in a factory in the Mainland China, earning around HK\$17,000 (~US\$2,185) in the early 90s; and Participant B was a government official earning about HK\$80,000 (~US\$10,286) per month, enjoying a high standard of living. However, he purchased a private flat at its peak price in 1997 and his subsequent loss of job caused him to suffer from negative equity and hence bankruptcy. As for Participant C, though he was engaged in illegal businesses/ underground economy in the past, he

enjoyed an extravagant lifestyle. All these past experiences required them extra adaptability to transit to a new mode of life. The social work practitioner also agreed with such observation. She said:

I feel that [they] need to undergo a big transformation which is to let go their past [i.e., not to dwell in their past]. If they were still living in the past, indulging themselves in the good old days, they would not be able to accept the reality....

7.3.2.4 *Family as an important source of Motivation*

And it was found that besides the stigmatization effect in receiving CSSA, the strongest motivation leading to such adaptability or determination to leave the CSSA net was often due to family-related motives (10 segments of data were coded). Participant B could be regarded as an epitome to illustrate this. Though he has divorced, he in fact requested such separation for the sake of his wife and daughter in order to protect them from suffering from his bankruptcy. He loved them so much and is a very responsible man and his patriarchal character led him to always assume the role of a protector and provider, even in times of economic difficulties. And he told me that in between lines in his communication with his wife, he could appreciate his wife's love and support for him:

When I was in the deepest trough in my life..... I could hear her words of encouragement.... I tried to escape from them; I hid myself and didn't want to see anyone and anything. But her occasional words of encouragement could really help me..... She said, 'You don't have to worry about us (his wife and daughter), just live as if you were alone.' It seems that she's pushing me out to the big ocean. But we have been living together for such a long time; I knew clearly that she meant exactly the opposite. How could I not understand her? And I knew that she has gathered tremendous courage to say this, and I could feel the pain in her. She felt that I wanted to give up, that's why she told me to live my own life which means she's urging me to stand up and put myself back to a piece, and I could in fact feel her sense of dependence on me.

That actually served as a strong motivation for him to put himself back into one piece and strive to live. After he has successfully found a full-time job as a security guard and a related part-time job in the same security company helping with the duty roster, he earned a total monthly income of around HK\$9,000 (~US\$1,157), but he just kept HK\$2,000 (~US\$257) per month for himself because he thought he could maintain his living with that amount of money when he was in welfare rolls and he wished to practice a simple and frugal lifestyle after all the drastic changes in his life. Before this, he had an extravagant lifestyle and could spend more than a thousand

Hong Kong dollars a night. His motivation to practice a frugal lifestyle has been driven by an even more important reason; he wished to continue supporting the livelihood of his family and to be a responsible father to the largest possible extent. He indeed made the promise in the family court that he would just keep HK\$2,000 (~US\$257) of his monthly income and all the rest would be given to his ex-wife and daughter as maintenance.

As for Participant H, she chose to work so that her family could step out of the CSSA net as the low-income category. She actively made that choice even though she admitted that working was indeed really energy-straining and that the sudden loss of government subsidies actually imposed financial hardships on them especially when they needed to spend a considerable amount of money, for instance, buying textbooks, school uniforms etc., which was used to be included in the CSSA. Despite these difficulties and the fact that she had to loan money from her relatives, she still actively chose to work as she would like to serve as a good role model for her children. She said:

Children often learnt from what the adults actually did So I think parents' actions and behaviours are really significant [to their children] I believe actions speak louder than words.

Children would only respect and obey their parents if they themselves actually behave like what they require of their children. If you only tell them to study harder, to earn more money etc., they would not listen to you. If I have the ability, but didn't work, they would say, 'you don't go to work either, you also rely on the government, I could also become lazier'.

As for Participant A, though he received CSSA as a singleton in Hong Kong, he indeed had a wife (not legally registered) and two sons in the Mainland China who depended on him as an economic provider. He opined that:

If I were really single and didn't have a family to look after, I didn't have to work. The government paid the rent for me and provided me with living subsidies. If I worked, I might only earn an extra HK\$2,000 (~US\$257), and I have to work really hard in exchange for that. Actually, the amount of CSSA for singletons is enough for one person, why not? But if you have a family, it's not enough. Even though it's enough for me, how about my wife and my sons?

The social work practitioner told me that in fact there were a lot of 'fake' singleton cases just like Participant A. They just need to dig the money to sustain the livelihood of their family, thus they often have strong motivation to work. Although

this motive is related to family values, it could also be regarded as an economic incentive, because after all it is a matter of life subsistence.

7.3.3 Program Factors Facilitating Successful Employment

Other than the above intrinsic motivation-related factors, it was found that the service the participants received in the IEAP and the social workers' intervention also played a part in their eventual successful employment. Though the social work practitioner found it difficult to locate one unique formula for all participants leading them to self-reliance, basically two significant program factors or intervention strategies are identified in this study.

7.3.3.1 Being-first Orientation

Firstly, the 'being-first orientation', as contrasted with the work-first or education-first approach which were both focused predominantly on employment, was recognized as a desirable and successful strategy in motivating participants to gainful employment and hence eventual self-reliance (31 segments of data were found). The 'being-first orientation' as literally explained emphasized the

participants' 'being' first instead of merely focusing on the 'doing' i.e., it does not merely deal with their employment needs. On the contrary, such orientation requires humanistic and genuine concern towards the totality needs and problems of the clients. The social work practitioner illustrated the 'being-first orientation' as follows:

Most often our clients' basic needs are not yet fulfilled and they don't have a good grasp of basic life skills, it is thus difficult to ask them to enter the job market all of a sudden. Actually, we did a lot of groundwork i.e., works with a lot of social work elements.... And our experience told us that more often they sought for help only when they came to a dead end. So basically, we have to handle a lot of things, for instance, help them find a dwelling place, a place where they could eat solve their debt problems etc. We have to help them solve all these urgent tangible problems as well as to attend to their emotions. Until they almost get back to a piece, they were ready to look for jobs.

According to the practitioners we interviewed, this is indeed common for most of their unemployed clients, especially the street sleepers and the ex-offenders who were often very much deprived and lack family and social support. The practitioners need perhaps one to two months for all these above-mentioned groundwork before they could actually deal with their unemployment issue. The unique feature of the being-first orientation in dealing with unemployment is that the professional workers

were not directly working on the unemployment problem; in reality, they have to simultaneously look after a lot of other things. The participants' marital problems were also an important area of their concern:

Once there was a client who never mentioned his wife and children, and whenever we mentioned them, he would become very angry.... He often said that the market didn't accept him for he is old, but actually he was just 40 years old. Later, we found out that actually his real pain lies in the fact that his wife chose to leave him due to his prolonged unemployment....in fact, we have to deal with many family problems....

(Social work practitioner 1)

Besides, the humanistic concern towards the participants, the ecological perspective and hence provision of holistic service was also important characteristics in the being-first orientation. This was further exemplified as follows:

This is indeed a holistic social service, for instance, there was a client who lost most of his teeth – don't think that it's unrelated to employment – he told me that when he smiled, it looks ugly and that's why he couldn't succeed in job interviews. Then I have to try to find funds for his dental care. Holistic human service is that you have to look after every minor bit and piece of the client served.We'll help them at different levels,

including family problems, parenting problems etc..... Sometimes we even need to do home visits. All in all, what we are doing is 'human service'. The clients could sense whether you have genuinely cared about them; if they felt your genuine concern towards them, they would accept our confrontations and would be willing to change.

(Social work practitioner 1)

Another social worker elaborated the change as follows:

Their mindset [could change] – originally they would only accept jobs of their own expertise, they would tell you not to refer jobs in other fields to them. But after we have established relationship with them, you could find their attitudes changed; their thoughts towards their employment and future also changed..... We would confront them by telling them that their expertise was now fading away and persuading them to try jobs in other fields which could also eke a living.... And gradually, they are willing to change.

This readiness to change was indeed the key to one of the success factors, adaptability, mentioned in the previous section.

It was found that the 'being-first orientation' encompasses and emphasizes several characteristics, namely, a person-centered approach, an ecological and holistic

perspective and a strengths perspective. All these point to the awareness of people's underlying desires, needs and capacities. All in all, the soul of this orientation calls attention to people's 'being' instead of their 'doing', at least one's well-being should be a prior concern or prerequisite to gainful employment and hence self-reliance.

The participants also showed their appreciation towards the social workers' genuine concern, acceptance and passion for their work. They found it especially important to know that somebody (the social workers) still cared about them during times of distress and feeling of abandonment by family or the society, and that actually served as a significant motivation towards a productive life. For instance, Participant C has been engaged in illegal businesses or underground economy for more than ten years and his 'boss' was actually his father. He claimed that he has worked for him assiduously, even on the edge of sacrificing his life, however he eventually decided to leave for he reckoned that he was betrayed by his own father. When he first came back to Hong Kong from the Mainland where he has been engaging in illegal activities, he was very upset and distressed to an extent that he has thought of giving up his life. At this point, he came to meet the IEAP worker and he reckoned the greatest help he received from the IEAP worker was emotional support and concern which likened a torch of fire during a snowy winter. This could also

enhance his motivation to engage quicker and better to a normal work life. He admitted that sometimes people need others to push and encourage them, and the social workers' presence and intervention indeed made a difference to his life.

7.3.3.2 Use of Social Capital in the Community

Another crucial and successful strategy identified was the use of the agency's social capital / relationships to provide a mutual aid ambience within the community. The operation of the cooperative is an epitome to illustrate the success. The agency lined up the unemployed IEAP participants who possessed related skills to form a cooperative to help the impoverished elderly in the community to refurbish and repair their flats for a relatively lower price. In that way, the unemployed earned some extra money and could develop their work skills; at the same time, the elderly benefited from their work for their flats are often old and torn but the financial constraints hinder them to undertake necessary renovations. Moreover, the agency's close and good relationships with the people in the community allow the cooperative to buy on credit the tools and materials needed enabling the kick off of the whole business. Besides, the agency workers also have a good relationship with the mass media and their reporting helped to promote the cooperative at no cost. They received numerous

enquiries and job orders as a result of the free advertisements on TV and in newspapers. The responses were so positive that they even got job orders from offices in Central, a high-rise commercial district.

This asset of community relationships had also proved to enable the successful employment of participants in the open market. For instance, some of the participants were living in Homes for the Street Sleepers, but after they have successfully found a job as security guards, they could no longer dwell in those Homes with cheap rent. This was because most of these Homes have curfew hours in the daytime, and security guards are required to work night shifts meaning they could not go back to their dwelling place when they were off in the daytime. Moreover, they could not afford to pay the rent, deposit and commission in the open market immediately after their employment. Once again, the social workers used their social capital to help solve their problems for they are familiar with some flat owners in the community who are also service users of their agency and have rooms or flats to rent. This then solved the problem of commission, and some flat owners were even willing to waive the deposit. With such all-rounded one stop support service, barriers and disincentives to employment were demolished, and the participants have no excuse in not accepting the job offer.

Besides housing problem, there were still other barriers, for instance some participants who have children to look after might have difficulty in working long hours. The agency then responded by mobilizing women mostly housewives in the community to help picking up their children from school and looking after them. These women in turn earned some money, which again creates a win-win situation.

7.3.4 Factors Inhibiting Successful Employment

In review of the successful factors leading to gainful employment, more internal and motivation-related attributes are identified. However, when it came to barriers to successful employment, more external and stable attributions⁵ are recorded, especially from the participants' perspective.

7.3.4.1 Age

One of the most important inhibiting factors commonly reported by both the practitioners and the participants, either successful or unsuccessful ones, was the age factor (10 segments of data were found). One participant, aged 50, sighed:

⁵ External and stable attributions refer to causal inferences whose locus of control is external to the actor and more unchangeable over time (Weiner, 1986)

In the past, I thought with my ability and experiences, it's not too difficult to find a job. I had indeed got a lot of job interviews. However, I had an impression that it's in fact impossible to find a job. Once [the employers] looked at my Identity Card, they basically won't offer me a job, that is, they're not considering my ability, but my [age].

7.3.4.2 *Market Constraints*

Most of them attributed their unemployment to the economic transformation (6 segments of data were coded). In the sixties and seventies, as the economy escalated, job vacancies and opportunities were abundant and awaiting for people; only if you were willing to work, you could definitely secure a job. However, as described in the previous chapters, Hong Kong has undergone an economic transformation and suffered from economic turmoil since 1997. The participants perceived that the whole ambience made life difficult for them as the long-term unemployed participants were mostly middle-aged, low educated and had low-income jobs which were very prone to the financial hit; as a result, few job vacancies in the open market were suitable for them, meaning that it was difficult for them to get a job in their previous industries or expertise. This constraint also resonated the finding that the participants' adaptability or willingness to change accounts for their successful employment.

Another barrier the participants experienced is the high requirements of the labour market, which are sometimes incomprehensible to them. For instance, one participant exclaimed:

They now encouraged people to study security courses. In the eighties and nineties, even if you are illiterate, you could still become a very good security guard, but now, you can't..... And they even need a license now..... I don't understand why they need the license. If you were a criminal, [you won't choose to work], committing crime surely earns more money..... The social worker helped me to get a license for operating a machine in construction sites, then I went for a job interview, however, the employer said that I had only obtained my license for less than a month; therefore they decided not to offer me the job. But I could only get my license if I passed the exam (with frustration). They often said they were looking for at least two years' experience, meaning that your license would only be useful two years later. At that time, I believe we already forgot how to operate the machine. I really don't understand why such licensing requirement exists. Until now I couldn't figure out why the government set all such rules and regulations, I don't know who could actually benefit from the system.

7.3.4.3 *Low Economic Incentives*

The practitioners identified and participants admitted that the relatively low wage in the open market as compared to the amount they received from CSSA (around HK\$3,000 including rent) is a major disincentive towards working (8 segments of data were coded). Participant A, who was a 'fake' singleton CSSA recipient, indeed has to support the livelihood of his wife and sons in the Mainland China, so he has chosen to reenter the labour market, however he explained why the real singleton CSSA recipients would avoid working:

For the singletons [CSSA recipients], earning a hundred and something dollars [per day] i.e., around five thousand dollars per month is not preferable to receiving CSSA. It's true that they could earn two thousand dollars more, but they have to work nine hours per day in exchange for that, it's so arduous; I really doubt they would prefer that.... But if say, they could earn around four thousand dollars in addition, they would strive for it. But now, they have to do nine hours' laborious work per day in exchange for only around two thousand dollars more, I bet they'll leave after two days' work..... Moreover, the expenses (food and transport) will increase when you have a job, there's a high tendency that the income is not adequate that they have to borrow money.

Participant G who was still unemployed also agreed that the low economic incentives actually hindered him to reenter the labour market:

Say if the wage is five thousand and five hundred dollars, deducting the traveling expenses etc, there's not much difference from receiving CSSA. But [working] would be much more strenuous, so why should I work?

The practitioner also agreed that the low wages and the high traveling and food expenses which might already constitute more than half of their income actually discouraged the participants in actively achieving self-reliance. And she thought that this phenomenon is also true and even truer for those participants receiving CSSA on a family basis for the total amount of CSSA increased as the number of household members or dependents increased.

The above narratives depicted a very true and realistic consideration of the CSSA recipients in the dilemma of work versus welfare. And it seems that work could not enable them to dig themselves out of the poverty trap.

7.3.4.4 *Inadequacies of the Human Capital Development*

As discussed in the previous chapters, there were proponents who opt for the 'education-first approach' emphasizing on human capital development, which was believed to bring about a long term effect on increased earnings. However, in this study, both the practitioners and the participants made heavy criticisms on Hong Kong's present human capital development programs for the low-income and low-education class (10 segments of data were coded). The major dissatisfactions included few options of retraining courses were available and that the programs offered lacked market sensitivity and most importantly, they could not lead to successful employment in the labour market. The practitioners exemplified the situation as follows:

I feel that there were few options of retraining courses, if not home help [courses], it would be security guard [courses]. Actually, there are still other courses, but there are few choices for our grassroot participants, which make it really difficult for them. They attended training after training, but still remained unemployed. Frankly speaking, not many of our female clients could really find jobs as home helpers after attending the retraining course..... I think they have to consider the job opportunities available and suitable for our participants and

should be more flexible in designing the retraining programs.... For instance, hairdressing, facial make-up or massaging, these should be suitable for women, but there are no formal [retraining] courses now..... Literacy should not be a requirement for these jobs, and our female clients are willing to learn and work....I think they should consider opening up such courses for the relatively low educated [unemployed recipients].....Or may be gardening, there are a lot of big housing estates nowadays which should need manpower to do the gardening etc.

Other than the above external and stable attributions, the practitioners also spotted some more internal causal inferences such as low self-esteem, the lack of interpersonal skills, poor communication skills and unrealistic expectations towards jobs as barriers to successful employment.

7.3.5 Barriers in Achieving Total Self-Reliance

The workfare approach basically assumed that employment or work is a path to self-reliance and a farewell to dependency on welfare rolls. However, in this study, it was found that successful employment does not necessarily equate with total self-reliance. And that several factors, both personal and institutional, were identified

in hindering the achievement towards eventual self-reliance.

7.3.5.1 *Poor Financial Management*

First of all, the practitioner reported that one problem she found difficult to solve and is also a major impediment leading to self-reliance is the participants' poor financial management, which means the money is not used in a wise manner. She cited one example:

I know a family of four: three sons aged above twenty and the mother, above forty. [All the three sons] completed their secondary education. Initially, I thought they should be able to get out of the CSSA net very soon; I thought if each son secured a job of say five thousand dollars, it would amount to a household income of fifteen thousand dollars per month. And I did help all of them to get a job.... But this family is always in need of money, their expenditure always exceed their income. They were not addicted in gambling, but they did not manage their finance well. He'll use the money to buy magazines, beautiful clothes..... and cats as pets etc. And when he wasn't sure how to reach a certain place, he would take taxi, even though his family was running out of money. It's very ridiculous indeed. It's not a problem of employment. It's not difficult for

him to get a job. Every time he got a job interview, he could start working the next day.... However, he spent money even more quickly. Every single family member was like that, even the mother.

Besides the unjustified extravagant money spending pattern, another aspect of poor financial management is the addiction of gambling. The practitioner found this a very serious problem if the participants have no firm determination to get rid of such behaviour. According to the practitioner's experience, if the participants could not dig themselves out of this temptation of gambling, even though they could secure ten jobs at the same time, their paths would not be sturdy and could easily fall back into the CSSA net.

7.3.5.2 *Low Market Wages*

Besides the above personal limitations, there were the more universal and institutional factors. One of them is the low market wages, which has also been identified earlier as one of the inhibiting factors leading to successful employment (6 segments of data were coded). This does not merely pose an adverse effect on the participants' incentives in getting a job, but also made a family, especially those with

only one breadwinner, difficult or even impossible to escape from the CSSA net even though they participate in the labour market. For instance, a family of four is currently receiving around eight thousand dollars CSSA per month, and nowadays in the job market, it is hardly possible for the IEAP participants to get a job with such a high monthly income. That means even though they willingly chose to participate in the labour market in exchange for such a low income, they could at best change their CSSA status to low-income, but are still far from total self-reliance.

7.3.5.3 *Flex-work*

Another emerging issue is the changing mode of work. The participants found that there were decreasing number of full-time jobs in the market, and one reason is that the employers tend to employ staff in a part time basis or on daily mode which would be referred to as flex-work (4 segments of data were coded). The participants interpreted this trend as a result of the implementation of the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) Scheme⁶, because if the employees were employed in a flex-work mode,

⁶ The Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Ordinance was first enacted in August 1995. And the System came into full operation on 1 December 2000. All employees and self-employed persons between the ages of 18 and 65 unless specifically exempted or unless employed for less than 60 days are required to join the scheme and are required to make contributions based on 5% of the employees' income, subject to maximum and minimum income levels. However, regardless of the employees' election, employers must contribute 5% of the employees' income. (<http://www.info.gov.hk/info/hkin/mpf.pdf>)

the employers were not liable to contribute to their MPF. In such circumstances, it is increasingly difficult for the IEAP participants to secure a source of stable income other than the CSSA.

Interestingly, the practitioners and the participants reported divergent views on the participants' preference towards the flex-work mode though both parties agreed that flex-work could not serve as a stable source of income. The practitioner found that some participants actually preferred to work in a flex-work mode. She observed that many of their unemployed clients were workers in the construction sites, and before the hard hit of the financial crisis, the housing market was in such a state of euphoria that the demand for construction workers were always high and they were already used to the flex-work mode since they only have to work say ten days a month in exchange for ten to twenty thousand dollars' monthly salary. Therefore, the practitioner discovered that they actually avoided and could not get used to long-working hour's job, for instance, security guards who are required to work twelve hours a day and six to seven days per week.

One participant also admitted that working flex-mode jobs would induce lower working pressure, but he said that he would still prefer a stable full-time job, because:

If you were employed in a flex-mode basis, you won't know which day you would be out of work, but there should be expenses every day.... Moreover, full-time jobs often include better welfare....

The participant also mentioned the lack of protection in working flex-mode jobs for there would be no labour insurance, and if you got wounded during work, you had to pay for your own medical expenses.

According to the participants, flex-work seemed not to be a desirable option when compared to full-time jobs. However, such working mode might more easily lead to the abuse of the current welfare system. One respondent admitted that he did not report earnings from flex-work to the Social Welfare Department, and he justified his behaviour for he thought that the seven thousand dollars his family received monthly from CSSA was not adequate to sustain their livelihood.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This final chapter aims at synthesizing the findings of the study. Through the discussion of the two groups of factors, namely the success factors and the barriers leading to employment and self-reliance, the desirability and feasibility of the specific workfare program studied are scrutinized, thus drawing policy and practical implications in the enhancement of workfare initiatives.

8.1 Success Factors Leading to Employment

As suggested in the previous chapters, this exploratory study aims at unveiling the black box of the actual implementation of the workfare program and gaining insights into why, to whom, and how this new alternative is desirable or otherwise. Firstly, I will try to analyze and discuss the ‘to whom’ question. It seems that most of the respondents welcomed this program and found it useful; at least they unanimously agreed that the IEAP is a more desirable alternative to the AEA carried out by the SWD, in terms of the practicality and quality of care and assistance provided.

However, not all respondents were able to achieve self-reliance through participating in the IEAP. It was found that the fresh CSSA recipients have a much higher tendency of success in the transition from CSSA to gainful employment when compared with their long-term counterparts. This finding was also supported by a quantitative study commissioned by the SWD (Tang et al., 2005). Nevertheless, this finding itself does not mean much, because those recipients who have been categorized as short-term recipients must have been successful in achieving self-reliance or else they would be regarded as long-term recipients. However, this finding could be interpreted or better understood when we tried to analyze and compare the inhibiting and facilitating factors leading to their successful employment and hence self-reliance. As noted above, the not yet successful participants or the long-term CSSA recipients mostly attributed their failure to achieve self-reliance to external and stable inferences, namely middle aged, economic transformation, and high requirements of the labour market, inadequacies in human capital development opportunities, and low economic incentives (i.e., low market wages). These institutional and economic barriers to employment were basically true and common to all IEAP participants, including the short-term CSSA recipients. It is therefore especially significant and meaningful to scrutinize why and how the successful participants account for their eventual exit from the CSSA net

despite the presence of these barriers.

8.1.1 Culture versus Economic Incentives

In analyzing the findings, it seems that the participants' differential dispositions, values and views towards receiving CSSA, towards work and towards life on the whole are influential factors explaining their success. Among the successful respondents, besides Participant C found himself better off after working, there were no conspicuous signs that the other participants became financially more well-off after transition to employment. It seems that the works available for the IEAP participants could not really bring them closer to balancing budgets than when receiving welfare benefits.

Participant H typified this situation for she actually had to borrow money from her brother after securing employment and leaving the CSSA net. This was because she could not afford the huge expenditure on textbooks and school uniforms for her three daughters all at the same time, but this would have been taken care of by the government when her family was on welfare dole. It appears that wage-reliant families and welfare-reliant families do not exhibit much difference financially, at

least in the short run. It is even more likely for the wage-reliant families to risk economic instability and financial hardships when compared with their welfare-reliant counterparts (Edin & Lein, 1997).

For participant B, he actively chose to remain leading a frugal lifestyle and kept more or less the same amount of money for himself as he was on CSSA to sustain his monthly living expenses even though the amount of his paycheck was nearly twofold higher than his welfare check. He chose voluntarily to set aside the remaining income for his divorced wife and daughter as maintenance. These are exemplars illustrating that what motivated the successful participants to actively choose trading the economic stability obtained from welfare for work is not solely economic incentives (i.e., a higher remuneration that brings about improvement on quality of life and material enjoyment).

In fact, in view of the low wage jobs available for them, economic incentives are logically not a strong motivation to work. What makes the difference seems to be factors of a cultural disposition, namely work ethics, values and life philosophy. The successful participants generally felt stigmatized and upset when they were receiving CSSA and viewed work as socially and morally desirable, which stood in stark

contrast with their unsuccessful counterparts who tended to view work as arduous and an irrational choice versus welfare. Ironically, this observation was also supported by Mead's (2005) conclusion that 'poor adults can and do exercise choice about whether to work. Culture rather than economics seems at the heart of their problems.' (p. 414).

8.1.2 *Family Solidarity*

The virtue of work⁷ and the non-economic incentives that were identified in the successful participants was found to be closely knitted with family values. Though it is difficult to find a universal definition of what family actually is, Mulvey (2005) identified common elements such as 'a committed relationship' and 'meeting members' basic needs' in definitions of families.

In review of these findings, both Participant A and Participant B assumed strong responsibility and the role of an economic provider for their wife and children. Both participants exhibited a strong desire to take care and protect their families and to ensure that their basic needs were met. This was very much consistent with the

⁷ 'The work ethic is fundamental to our conceptions of ourselves and our expectations of others. People ought to work hard not only to provide for their families, but because laziness and idleness are seen as indicators of weak moral character.' (Ellwood, 1988).

traditional Chinese culture which presupposed the male (or husband) to take up the role of breadwinner in a family. I believe this deeply ingrained thought did serve as an important source of motivation for them to strive for self-reliance. For instance, Participant H, the only female participant in the study also displayed traits and dispositions of traditional family values in the Chinese culture. There is a maxim saying that females (or wives) in a family should assist their husbands and socialize their children (相夫教子). This participant voluntarily chose to work and perceived work as desirable and worthwhile as she wanted to be a good role model for her three daughters. She recognized the importance to use her own actions to edify her daughters on the virtue of work. This was again consistent with another motto: actions speak louder than words (言教不如身教).

Besides an important source of intrinsic motivation to self-reliance, family values also manifest its power in respect of practical support. For instance, Participant H's brother had to loan her family money to cover the school related expenses for her three daughters after their independence from CSSA. It appears that support from extended family members also exerted a significant cushion effect to safeguard sustainable living of the ex-CSSA families, especially during the initial stage of welfare exit. Such finding which suggested that clients who were part of

extended families were not as vulnerable was also mentioned in Miller's (1991) study of the Work Incentive Program in the United States.

It seems that the primacy of family values had been deeply embedded in our traditional Chinese culture; nevertheless, such tenet was not unique to the indigenous context. Edin and Lein (1997) and Newman (1999) in their qualitative field studies, also identified family as an important survival strategy and motivation for the poor in their communities to achieve self-sufficiency.

Paradoxically, Miller (1991) discovered that families were also regarded as sources of anti-work values and practices, and troubles associated with families were used as excuses and extenuating circumstances in not fulfilling work obligations. Such observation was not conspicuous in this study. This was probably because the majority of participants in this NGO were male and many of whom were single or divorced. Anyhow, the nature of families was like water as in a Chinese saying: 'a boat needs water to float, but water could also make it sink'. Though this study considered family support and traditional family values as motivations to self-reliance instead of sources of anti-work values, dysfunctional families and inadequate family support seemed to make an individual more prone to

unemployment and had less impetus to move towards self-reliance.

Conclusively, it was found that functional familial relationships and family values could increase the tendency of successful self-reliance and prevent dependence on welfare, hence one indirect yet effective strategy in moving unemployed individuals to gainful employment seemed to be the strengthening of familial values, relationships and hence its effective functioning within the entire society. However, it should be made clear that I am not attempting to promote or reinforce the traditional masculinist breadwinner model or the gendered stereotype of men and women in both the public and private sphere. In fact, the gendered difference or male dominance in the labour market participation characterized in the period of industrial capitalism (Connell, 1995) seemed less and less relevant in today's modern working life since the economic transformation to a service-oriented and globalized economy (Dixon, 1997; Clare, 2000; Faludi, 2000). The female labour force participation in Hong Kong has indeed increased from around 47% in the 1980s to around 52% in recent years, while that for men has decreased for approximately 10%, from 80% to 70% in the past two decades (Census and Statistics Department, 2006). The once taken for granted patterns of gendered labour division has been challenged and new relations should be established. Thus, by advocating

the strengthening of family values, I am not holding up the 'old' gender stereotyped roles within the domestic household, but I am rather suggesting the promotion of a system of social support which facilitates various forms of interdependence and care between networks of individuals (McDowell, 2004).

Actually, family has long been considered as a primary social and economic unit in every society around the globe, no matter in Western or Chinese societies. Sadly, this important support system for individuals has been under attack and undergoing persistent disintegration (Mulvey, 2005). The number of divorce decree granted in Hong Kong has increased from 53 485 in 1991 to 152 349 in 2001, a nearly threefold increase in a decade's time (Census and Statistics Department, 2006). Moreover, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service has developed a Social Development Index (SDI) to assess local social and economic needs over time, from 1986 to 2000. Among the fourteen Social Development Indices, only the family solidarity scale recorded a social loss of -74 in 2000 which was a very substantial loss, and its subindex, divorce as a percentage of marriages, increased from 4.7 in 1981 to 43.4 in 2000 (The Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 2002). Such development is especially worrying when all other sectors demonstrated impressive improvements. In fact, the workfare rhetoric promoting self-sufficiency through

employment gained currency not only because the government expenditure was under pressure but the traditional support provided by the family also seemed unsustainable. Paradoxically, the finding in this study suggested that for the welfare programs to be successful, family indeed played a significant role. In a globalized economy, individuals exposing to the high degree of commodification were even more vulnerable. In such a context, the state's desired abacus to shift responsibility in the provision of social protection to the activation of self-provisioning individuals seemed not very viable without a simultaneous creation or enhancement of their support system, in this case, the family.

As such, work and family appeared to be highly interconnected and are important pillars in a sustainable society. Nonetheless, state protection was still inevitable to the welfare proponents. They claimed that welfare was inevitable in providing security for families and children at risk, to ensure their basic well-being to be protected. Interestingly, another paradox was again observed when we look into the relationship between welfare and family. Anti-welfarists argued that social welfare is in fact a catalyst in debilitating families; they proposed that government benefits cause marital disruption and formation of single-parent families (Moffitt, 1988; Ellwood and Bane, 1985; Hoffman and Duncan, 1995). Such dilemma between

family versus welfare was often spotted. Social security and benefits provided for single-parents would make divorce decisions less thorny, but it is logical to believe that the presence of minimal welfare benefits in Hong Kong would not be as big an incentive to actually instigate a divorce. Marital dissatisfaction due to extramarital affairs was instead found to be a significant determinant of divorce in Hong Kong (Fan & Lui, 2004). Moreover, it was unethical, for instance, to obstruct one to leave an abusive spouse by introducing policy and legal barriers just for the sake of inhibiting the formation of broken families. Thus, I believe policy decisions should be navigated towards the direction of strengthening family cohesiveness and solidarity rather than introducing barriers in restraining family disruption. I believe the strengthening of solidarity and mutuality within families would be a big challenge not only to policy-makers, but also to social work professionals and educators.

8.1.3 Being-first Orientation:

An Alternative to Education-first and Work-first Approach

In reviewing the literature on various strategies on workfare programs, it was found that the dominant debate lies in the work-first versus education-first approach

as discussed in Chapter Four. However, both approaches did not find much favour in the eyes of the participants.

For the education-first approach which emphasized on training and education prior to job search aiming at an eventual increase in income and hence quality of life seemed to be an unreachable goal for the interviewees. One reason might be that the clients recruited in the NGO and hence those who participated in this study were mostly middle-aged and low educated, therefore education, at the first place, was not their cup of tea, and such investment hardly generates promising returns, because ‘persons from disadvantaged environments are not very malleable after their late teens or perhaps their early 20s’ (Economist, 1996), which differs from widely recognized educational programs for young people or young single mothers in New Brunswick (McFarland & Mullaly, 1995). And the varieties of human capital / job retraining programs available were few and all of them were low-income jobs. Majority of the women were enrolled to home help training; and men to security guards’ training, hence boosting the supply which made entrance to the job market even more difficult. And the participants’ experiences were that these training programs were not market-sensitive, and employers would prefer employees with relevant working experience instead of a retraining license. Moreover, the (continual)

completion of training programs and yet still not finding a job might lead to frustration and repeated disappointment which could render such human capital development programs as the ultimate self-esteem destroyer (Dean, 2003; McFarland & Mullaly, 1995).

While the work-first approach widely adopted and encouraged in the American-style workfare programs, though seemed to be more welcomed than the human capital approach, was also not very desirable in the local context. One reason was that when participants were mandated to engage in jobs which were unfavourable to them, they would easily develop resistance, and they would hardly succeed in job interviews, and even though they succeeded, the employment would not be sustainable. Moreover, men as rational beings as supported by the rational choice theory, would weigh between the benefits of work versus welfare. When the wages in the open market and perceived prospect were too low to outweigh the stability and benefits in receiving welfare, participants would rather choose to stay on dole than in the chronic insecurity of low-pay / no-pay cycle in the labour market. Thus, when cultural factors as suggested earlier did not amount to adequate motivation for self-reliance through work, economic incentives then became the drive. If that is the case, the work-first strategy would not be feasible without any

sanctions on the continual reception of welfare to offset the economic fragility in the job market. However, such stick policies were not welcomed by the social welfare sector due to its doubtful effectiveness and generation of more serious working-poor problem as more people were pushed into the commodified labour market, thus boosting the labour supply and hence further pressurizing the already low market wages.

Another argument with regard to the infeasibility of the work-first approach suggested by the social workers was that according to their frontline experience, able-bodied individuals do not necessarily equate with job-ready individuals. Such observation was consistent with another qualitative research (UK Economic and Social Research Council, 2005). They found that the problem of unemployment did not exist independently; their participants were often simultaneously facing multiple problems which could range from very practical problems such as a need for food and shelter to emotional and psychological problems, for instance, feeling of abandonment and frustration as a result of family disruption. One possible reason might be that their particular clientele were mostly street-sleepers, ex-offenders etc. who were highly deprived of social support and resources and hence facing multiple problems and needs. The social work professionals had to deal with all these

problems and ensure that their basic needs were met in order for the participants to get back to a piece for till then they were physically, mentally and emotionally ready for work.

For participants who lack stable personal relationships and whose well-being or sense of identity were virtually torn apart in their prior life encounter, the social workers' intervention, namely the provision of care and concern; acceptance and respect were like a torch of fire, though the blaze might not be very strong, it brought light and warmth to the total darkness and despair. Neither the work-first approach nor the education-first approach allowed these participants the time, space and resources to recover from the prior traumatic experiences and to cope with their problems.

The being-first orientation is clearly a more preferred street-wise approach to the work-first approach in welfare-to-work programs. It is collaborative rather than mandatory in nature, allowing participants to prioritize their needs and the right to choose in a responsible manner. This minimizes the participants' resistance and hence allowing the effectiveness of a professional helping relationship to maximize.

Moreover, this strategy is actually in line with the Social Development Model proposed by Midgley (1995). Unlike the work-first approach which stresses predominantly on the recommodification of labour yet neglects the well-being and rights of individuals, the being-first orientation helps to extend the conception of social welfare and hence workfare beyond the eligibility of welfare benefits to the overall well-being of individuals, which is a clear goal and emphasis in the Social Development Approach. This does not mean that moving participants back to work was not important, however, it was believed that a person's well-being is a prerequisite or important determinant for successful and sustainable employment. This implies that not only problems were addressed, but needs were met and opportunities for advancement were provided. This three-tier intervention is again another emphasis in Midgley's Social Development Approach (Midgley, 1995).

This particular IEAP studied was also found to realize the harmonization of the social objectives through the holistic intervention of the totality needs of the individuals, and economic objectives through the activation of unemployed individuals to work for the betterment and productivity of the whole economy.

The being-first orientation is also a more preferred alternative to the

education-first approach in that it acknowledges the fact that inadequate or unmatched skills and education were not the sole barrier to unemployment. In addition, it allows a more person-centered, tailor-made and holistic service to enhance one's employability or job-readiness rather than the few opportunities of the prescribed training programs.

Indeed somewhat similar findings were echoed by Dean, Bonvin, Vielle & Farvaque (2005) in investigating the labour market experiences of people with multiple problems and needs in the UK. He promoted the policy concept of 'work-life balance' and opted for an approach that would extend beyond both the work-first and human capital approaches.

The above discussion on the being-first orientation and the importance of the utilization of social workers' social capital in the local community highlighted in Chapter Seven both point to the significance of the professional and street-wise intervention of social work practitioners.

It seems that the factors facilitating the success of welfare-to-work programs all point to an ethic of care in the socio-cultural context. Interestingly, the normative

stance of self-reliance advocated by welfare programs was apparently facilitated by interdependence of individuals in various forms of relationships. In fact, the notion of self-sufficiency was believed to be a myth and unrealizable rhetoric as far as the classical times of the Athenic philosophy for humans were always regarded as interdependent beings.

8.2 Barriers to Sustainable Employment and Self-Reliance

When analyzing the success factors leading to employment, it was found that the cultural factors did play an important role. In fact, such findings should be inevitable in view of the low economic incentives actually offered via work. Thus, we should not simply conclude that culture is the sole prescription to joblessness and pay no attention to other personal or social structural barriers and disincentives in the labour market. To obtain a fairer and fuller picture, we must also take into account the factors that discourage people from work and inhibit sustainable self-reliance.

8.2.1 Long Spell on Welfare

All the facilitating factors discussed previously were referred to the short-term recipients for all the successful cases who participated in the study has been on welfare for less than six months, and no long-termers interviewed had indeed succeeded in exiting the welfare net and more often they came in and out of the safety net with occasional employment but still far from maintaining full independence. All long-termers participated in this study had been on welfare rolls for years: the shortest one, three years with short-term intermittent exits, and the longest one, seven years. Bane and Ellwood (1994) found that exit rates were particularly lower for those whose spell durations were more than two years in the United States. The neo-liberals would easily explain such phenomenon as welfare dependency or a 'culture of poverty'. I would not rule out this likely possibility as some participants also admitted that they became lazier after prolonged duration on welfare. However, it is still premature to solely attribute their failure in exit to a dependency culture, which could easily render negligence to other personal traits that might at the first place hinder them from sustainable employment. For instance, it was observed that the long-termers have less appealing appearance, poorer verbal communication skills and lower self-confidence than their successful counterparts.

And these characteristics might well exist from the very first day they stepped into a welfare office.

As long-term recipients cumulated, they naturally constitute the majority of the CSSA population, indeed over 50% of the CSSA participants had been on welfare for three years or more (Social Welfare Department, 2006b), thus they certainly deserved more large-scale and in-depth study in analyzing factors preventing them to transit from welfare to work.

8.2.2 Low Economic Incentives

Though work and family ethics and relational attributes were found to be important driving forces leading to successful employment, it should not be the intention of policymakers to just merely move people from welfare to work without scrutinizing whether such activation would lead to the improvement of the overall well-being of the participants or was it indeed an inferior alternative to staying on welfare in terms of decent living. The one very real fact that we could not ignore is the low economic incentives obtained from work for the IEAP participants for they were only accessible to low wage and most often physical labour demanding jobs in

the open market. The monthly CSSA payment (standard rate and rent allowance) for an able-bodied single person is HK\$2,875 (~US\$370) not including other grants such as telephone installation, medical expenses or domestic removal etc., which they are also eligible to. The interviewees commonly reported monthly wages of around HK\$5,000 (~US\$640) for jobs suitable for them; however, discounting the work-related expenses, the wages they earned from work could not really enhance their living standard in the economic aspect. The hope that work would solve the problem of poverty remains a tale, and this is even truer for families comprising of two members or more. For instance, for a four-member family comprising the unemployed able-bodied applicant, his wife who is a homemaker and two school-aged children, their monthly CSSA payment is approximately HK\$9,000 to HK\$10,000 (~US\$1157 to US\$1285). On top of which, they are also eligible to other grants such as school-related expenses including textbooks, uniforms etc. In such cases, a sole breadwinner in the family could hardly drag themselves out of welfare; even if the family had two wage earners, it would still be difficult for them to achieve self-reliance abruptly. And another emerging trend in the open labour market is the increasing number of flex jobs especially found in the lower rung of wage-level jobs, further marginalizing the working poor with minimal legal protection. The future challenge ahead will thus be 'how to make work pay'.

Of course, the neo-liberalists would interpret welfare as too generous which helps to create dependency and they would thus urge for welfare retrenchments or the imposition of a time-limit in receiving welfare benefits just as in the recent welfare reform in the United States. This move sounds risky and worrying to most academics initially, but after several years of implementation, studies seemed to prove such a move successful generally in terms of the unprecedented fall in welfare caseloads (from 5 million families at its peak to a little more than 2 million) and the actual poverty rate has indeed declined. However, an important point to note is that such success has been made possible with the coexistence of several factors such as a coincidental economic growth, a rising real wage since the minimum wage increases enacted in 1996, the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and an expansion of health care and child care subsidies (Jencks, Swingle & Winship, 2006; Greenberg, 2004). It seems that the combination of the abovementioned cushioning measures had helped to minimize the hurt that the time-limit policy would actually bring about. While all these alleviating measures such as enactment of minimum wage etc. required substantial government intervention which is very much in line with the left proponents, it seems that a combination of stick and carrot policies or coercion and care is an emerging consensus to tackle the problem of poverty. Such an approach also echoes Midgley's (1995) Social Development Model in the

harmonization of both economic and social objectives in order to promote the overall well-being of the whole population.

Workfare programs or more specifically, the rationale in activating the unemployed back to work helps to reconcile the two dominant and dichotomous camps in the social welfare ideology and made possible for alternatives to realize in between the spectrum. But of course, the real challenge lies in the philosophy of what actually is the right or effective blend of compulsion and care with reference to the particular economic and social circumstances of the society.

8.3 Implications and Conclusion

Irrespective of the government's intention in implementing workfare programs, the goal in activating the able-bodied unemployed individuals to re-enter the labour market and reintegrate into the society seems to be a unanimous consensus and was welcomed by both the left and the right parties. Thus far the debate merely lies in the actual implementation strategies. And the findings of this particular study seemed to suggest that the Social Development Approach could indeed be realized and was found to be desirable in the implementation of workfare programs.

Firstly, as illustrated in earlier chapters, one unique feature of the IEAP is its tripartite partnership: public sector responsible for administering and monitoring the whole project; private sector is the funding source; and the third sector designs and implements their own individual projects which suits the special needs of their clientele.

It was found that the freedom granted to the NGO in designing and implementing the program was a favourable factor in enhancing the success of this particular IEAP, and indeed still more autonomy was anticipated from the social work practitioners, for instance, in the management of the TFA and the recruitment of participants. In this aspect, the role of the state was suggested to be minimized. Nevertheless, it was important to note that the funding source from the private sector was only for an one-off pilot program, temporary in nature. To ensure the sustainability of the program, the financial source must be stabilized and should be incorporated as regular services in the long run. In view of this, the state would then have an important role to make. This inevitable and leading role of the government is again in line with the administrative style 'managed pluralism' advocated by Midgley (1995).

In addition and more importantly, this study, from the users' perspective, found that the overall well-being of the population could indeed be bettered by the harmonization of social and economic objectives as suggested by Midgley (1995). This was found to be realized in the mixture of an ethic of coercion and an ethic of care in the IEAP studied. The ethic of coercion was denoted in the compulsory participation, which promoted work ethic and helped in tackling the possible creation of dependency or inertia arising from welfare benefits hence producing a positive impact on the economy. While the ethic of care was demonstrated by the being-first orientation as a dominant approach in the intervention found in this particular IEAP. The focus on the holistic well-being of the participants and the collaboration between the practitioners and the participants could help balance the negative stigmatization and resistance arising from the mandatory participation. This also suggested the importance of involving professional social workers in the implementation of the program, but not just employment officers as in the AEA or in most workfare programs in the West.

As discussed earlier, total self-reliance is virtually impossible, for human beings are interdependent beings that required a system and network of support, thus the ethic of care should be further promoted in enhancing the success of workfare

programs. Besides the being-first orientation, it should also include the strengthening of family solidarity, the involvement of professional social workers' intervention in employment assistance, and the enhancement of legal protection for the working poor etc. The challenge ahead seems to be how to transform work from something detestable into meaningful and wealth generating assets. The findings in this study were able to suggest some crude directions, however further research would still be required to shed light on the actual implementation of the above recommended policy directions.

APPENDIX 1

The Distribution of the 40 Operating Agencies

Southern District:

1. Aberdeen Kai-fong Welfare Association Social Service Center

Eastern and Wanchai District:

2. Lok Kwan Social Service
3. Methodist Center

Central, Western and Islands District:

4. St. James Settlement

Kwun Tong District:

5. Christian Action
6. Hong Kong Family Welfare Society Shun Lee Integrated Family Service Center
7. International Social Service Hong Kong Branch -- Kwun Tong Center
8. Training and Employment Service Center (Kwun Tong Office) -- MHAHK

Wong Tai Sin and Sai Kung District:

9. HKCT Social Service Unit
10. New Territories (Tsui Lam) Center Hong Kong Family Welfare Society
11. Hong Kong Y.W.C.A. Lung Cheung Integrated Social Service Center
12. Po Leung Kuk 88 Kwun Tong Workshop
13. The Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, HK -- Power Added Employment Project

Kowloon City District:

14. Martha Boss Lutheran Community Center Group and Community Unit
15. S.K.H. Holy Carpenter Church Community Center

Yau Tsim Mong District:

16. Industrial Evangelistic Fellowship Employment Development Service Center
17. Mong Kok Kai Fong Association Ltd. Chan Hing Social Service Center
18. The Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, HK - New Power

Employment Project

19. Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service Multicultural Service Center for South Asian Ethnic Minorities

Sham Shui Po District:

20. ADPL Sam Hong Workers Employment Support Center
21. Hong Kong Single Parents Association
22. Society for Community Organization
23. YMCA of Hong Kong Cheung Sha Wan Center

Sha Tin District:

24. H.K. PHAB Association
25. TWGHs Shatin Integrated Service for Young People

Tai Po and North District:

26. Christian Action -- Sheung Shui Service Center
27. Training Employment and Service Center (Tai Po and North Office) --MHAHK

Yuen Long District:

28. Caritas Yuen Long Rural Community Development Project
29. Hong Kong Y.W.C.A. Tin Shui Wai Integrated Social Service Center
30. International Social Service Hong Kong Branch --Yuen Long Center
31. Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service Tin Shui Wai Social Service Center
32. Yuen Long Town Hall

Tuen Mun District:

33. ELCHK Tuen Mun Integrated Employment Assistance Project
34. Hong Kong Employment Development Service Ltd Yuen Long Employment Resource Center
35. Tuen Mun District Women's Association

Tsuen Wan/Kwai Tsing District:

36. HK Outlying Islands Women's Association
37. New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association Supported Employment Service
38. New Territories Association Retraining Center
39. H.K.S.K.H. Lady Macle hose Center
40. Women Service Association

APPENDIX 2

Questions in the Interview Guide

A. For the IEAP participants

Questions	Relevance to Research Question ¹
1) What are your views towards the program?	1
2) What are your feelings towards the program?	1
3) What do you like and dislike most about the program?	1 & 3
4) How do you interpret the purposes and objectives of the program?	1
5) Did you spot any changes of yourself after participating in the program? What are they? How did it happen?	1, 2 & 3
6) Do you think the program meet your needs? Why?	1, 2 & 3
7) Do you anticipate in escaping from poverty/ CSSA net permanently? Why?	1, 2 & 3

Note. ¹Refer to research questions in Chapter One.

B. For the Social Work Practitioners

Questions	Relevance to Research Question ¹
1) What are your views towards the program?	1
2) Can you identify any strengths and weaknesses of the program?	1 & 3
3) What are your feelings towards the program?	1
4) What do you like and dislike most about the program?	1 & 3
5) How do you interpret the purposes and objectives of the program?	1
6) Did you spot any changes in the participants after participating in the program? What are they? How did it happen?	1, 2 & 3
7) Did you spot any changes between the short-term and long-term CSSA participants?	2 & 3
8) Do you think the program meet the target groups' needs? Why?	1, 2 & 3
9) Do you anticipate the participants in escaping from poverty or CSSA net permanently? Why?	1, 2 & 3

10) Did you encounter any difficulties in carrying out the program?	1 & 3
11) Do you have any suggestions in improving the program?	1, 2 & 3
12) Do you have alternative solutions in helping the participants to escape from poverty or the CSSA net permanently?	3

Note. ¹Refer to research questions in Chapter One.

The above questions are not exhaustive. They could be changed, modified or extended during the course of data collection and analysis as new themes emerged.

APPENDIX 3

Case Summary and Analysis Sheet

For Social Worker 1, First Interview

A. General Impression on the Interviewee:

1. She is very helpful, informative, frank and vocal.
2. She has a thorough grasp of knowledge concerning the unemployment condition and social security policies in Hong Kong.
3. She exhibited genuine concern and acceptance towards the clients served.
4. She found her work meaningful.

B. Factual Information about their project:

1. Main target groups served:
Street-sleepers, ex-offenders, new immigrants, ethnic minority, in which street-sleepers are the majority. They are either CSSA recipients or near CSSA recipients, which mean they are eligible for CSSA, but have not applied for it.
2. Profile of the participants:
 - a) Majority aged 40-50
 - b) 90% male; 10% new immigrant females
 - c) 1-2% ethnic minority
 - d) Majority primary level educational attainment
3. The first batch of their project has achieved the target of 40% successful employment rate in the performance indicators set by the SWD.
4. The minimum number of participants should be 100, however, they have exceeded it by 99 cases.
5. The services offered include group trainings, intensive case management, referrals, job-matching and the establishment of a cooperative/ small-scale business.

C. Main Themes and Impressions:

1. In the intervention, the workers demonstrated acceptance, genuine concern and empathy towards participants. They not only focus on moving them back to the labour market as soon as possible (i.e. not the work-first approach), but rather adopt a being-first orientation, seeking to understand the participants holistically with the help of the ecological approach, allowing them space for ventilation and freedom and flexibility to determine what is beneficial to them. Another important

characteristics is the emphasis on the strengths perspective, i.e. to find and emphasize the strengths of the participants. Furthermore, they mobilize support from family members and peers, as well as resources from the community to assist participants back to employment.

2. One prominent strength of the IEAP is the freedom granted to NGOs and hence encouraged innovative solutions to the unemployment problem.
3. One major weakness of IEAP is that the monitoring of the Temporary Financial Aid is so inefficient and unnecessary, which fail to serve the purpose of urgent usage of the fund. Hence, decentralization is recommended. Another weakness observed is the mismatch between resources and participants. Thus, the authority to select participants was recommended.
4. Most IEAP participants lack self-confidence, often feel distressed in face of the labour market and government welfare policies. They lack resources and social support and are often facing multiple problems.
5. Their negative self-concepts are highly associated with their experiences, such as rejection from the labour market and abandoned by family members.
6. Some participants had once been very wealthy and had relatively high social status, especially before 1997, but have experienced drastic changes, and some of them even become street-sleepers.
7. Experiences and adaptability of the participants, encouragement and support from family and peers, the successful intervention as well as job availability seem to be crucial factors leading to successful employment.
8. Due to the humiliating experiences they encountered in job-searching and SWD, the involuntary participants tend to view IEAP as government's another tactic in humiliating them, thus exhibited resistant behaviour; while those near CSSA recipients or short-term CSSA recipients showed more eagerness and motivation to work and viewed CSSA as transitional and their last resort; as for those long-term CSSA recipients, dependency and inertia have been observed.
9. Unfavourable personal attributes, poor market conditions, nature of human capital development programs and inadequate positive incentives are the major barriers to employment. Personal attributes include age, educational attainment, EQ, desire to work and outward appearance; whereas the unfavourable market conditions include few job vacancies, high requirements, age discrimination, low wage and long working hours; moreover, there are few options and stringent admission requirements for the retraining programs.
10. Poor financial management and uncontrollable gambling behaviour seem to be determining barriers in leaving poverty and CSSA net, which also proved to be difficult to handle, thus another intensive project for these particular clients was

recommended. And sole breadwinner in a family together with low wage in the labour market is also another important barrier towards complete self-reliance.

11. Other recommendations include introducing more positive incentives e.g. relaxation of the current disregarded earnings policy, expand varieties of human capital development programs, job creation and managed pluralism.
12. No direct relationship between the IEAP and the long term sustainable employment was observed.

D. Speculations and Hypotheses

1. The level of dependency on CSSA depends on the length of time in CSSA.
2. The being-first orientation, holistic assessment, ecological approach and strengths perspective seems to be more preferable to the traditional dichotomy of work-first and education-first approaches.
3. Relational attributes, for instance, worker-participant relationship, family's support and peer encouragement seem to be crucial factors in facilitating successful employment.
4. If employment/work could serve some higher ends other than just eke a living to sustain life, for instance, recognition from family members, participants would be more motivated, and hence more likely to find a job and stay in the employment status.
5. Able-bodied don't necessarily mean job-ready.

E. Alternative Explanations

1. The level of dependency on CSSA correlates strongly with the length of time in CSSA, however the length of time might not be the determining variable, it might be due to other variables such as personality, ability etc.
2. The being-first approach might be effective to those who are encountering multiple problems, but might not work for those who develop dependency on welfare.

F. Next Steps for Data Collection

1. Explore further the meaning of work to participants.
2. Explore more on what motivates the participants to work.
3. Are there any advantages of work over living on welfare rolls?
4. Explore more on what's meant by job-ready.

APPENDIX 4

Within Case Display for Participant B

Timeline	Age	Family Career	Employment Career	Housing Career	
1975	21	Single	Graduated from university, then employed as 抄標員 in Water	Live with his family of origin	
		Married (and birth of daughter)	Supplies Department (monthly income: from \$99 to \$80,000+)	Live with his father, wife and daughter (Private Flat owned by his father)	
1997	43	Wife (being laid off)		Purchase private flat, worth \$3,000,000+ (downpayment: \$65,000)	
2002	48		Early compulsory retirement due to the conviction of the Civil servants' Ordinance (seven years before entitlement to retirement benefits)	<div>Entrance to IEAP as near CSSA recipients</div> <div>bankrupt</div> <div>Private rental (rent per month: \$12,000)</div> <div>Wife and daughter stay in mother-in-law's house</div> <div>He became a street-sleeper</div> <div>Shelter for street-sleepers</div>	
2003			Unemployed (no income, live on savings)		
Feb 2004	50				
Aug 2004			Apply for CSSA (duration: one month)		
Nov 2004		Separated with wife	1 full-time job + 1 part-time job (monthly income: \$9,000+)		

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